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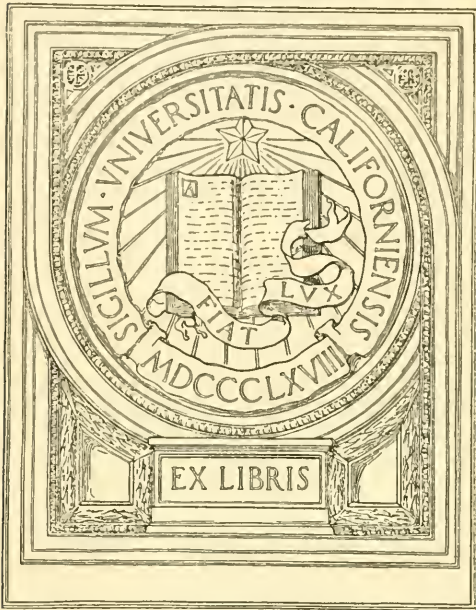
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The Explorer
W. Somerset Maugham



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
AT LOS ANGELES



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THE EXPLORER

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

(Uniform with this Volume)

PLAYS :

A MAN OF HONOUR

LADY FREDERICK

JACK STRAW

MRS. DOT

PENELOPE

(In Preparation)

SMITH

THE TENTH MAN

GRACE

LOAVES AND FISHES

LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN

THE EXPLORER

A MELODRAMA

In Four Acts

By W. S. MAUGHAM

LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN
MCMXII

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This play was first produced at the Lyric Theatre on Saturday, June 13, 1908, with the following cast :

ALEXANDER MACKENZIE	LEWIS WALLER
RICHARD LOMAS	A. E. GEORGE
DR. ADAMSON	CHARLES ROCK
SIR ROBERT BOULGER, BT.	OWEN ROUGHWOOD
GEORGE ALLERTON	SHIEL BARRY
REV. JAMES CARBERY	S. J. WARMINGTON
CAPTAIN MALLINS	A. CATON WOODVILLE
MILLER	CHARLES CECIL
CHARLES	P. DIGAN
MRS. CROWLEY	EVA MOORE
LADY KELSEY	MARY RORKE
LUCY ALLERTON	EVELYN MILLARD

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St. & B.

THE EXPLORER

CHARACTERS

ALEXANDER MACKENZIE
RICHARD LOMAS
DR. ADAMSON
SIR ROBERT BOULGER, BT.
GEORGE ALLERTON
THE REV. JAMES CARBERY
CAPTAIN MALLINS
MILLER
CHARLES
LADY KELSEY
MRS. CROWLEY
LUCY ALLERTON

TIME : *The Present Day.*

SCENE : *The First and Third Acts take place at Lady Kelsey's house ; the Second at Mackenzie's camp in Central Africa ; and the Fourth at the house of Richard Lomas.*

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THE EXPLORER

THE FIRST ACT

SCENE: LADY KELSEY'S *drawing-room in Mayfair.*
At the back is a window leading on to a balcony.
On the right a door leads to the staircase, and on
the left is another door. It is the sumptuous room
of a rich woman.

[LADY KELSEY is seated, dressed in black; she is a woman of fifty, kind, emotional, and agitated. She is drying her eyes. MRS. CROWLEY, a pretty little woman of twenty-eight, very beautifully dressed, vivacious and gesticulative, is watching her quietly. The REV. JAMES CARBERY, a young curate, tall and impressive in appearance, ponderous and self-important, is very immaculate in a silk waistcoat and a large gold cross.

CARBERY.

I cannot tell you how sincerely I feel for you in this affliction, Lady Kelsey.

LADY KELSEY.

You're very kind. Every one has been very kind.

But I shall never get over it. I shall never hold up my head again.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Nonsense! You talk as if the whole thing weren't perfectly monstrous. Surely you don't for a moment suppose that your brother-in-law won't be able to explain everything away?

LADY KELSEY.

God forbid! But still, it's dreadful to think that at this very moment my poor sister's husband is standing in the felon's dock.

CARBERY.

Dreadful, dreadful!

LADY KELSEY.

If you only knew the agonies I've suffered since Fred was arrested! At first I couldn't believe it, I wouldn't believe it. If I'd only known such a thing was possible, I'd have done anything to help him.

CARBERY.

But had you any idea he was in difficulties?

LADY KELSEY.

He came to me and said he must have three thousand pounds at once. But I'd given him money so often since my poor sister died, and every one said I oughtn't to give him any more. After all, some one must look after his children, and if I don't hoard my money a little, George and Lucy will be penniless.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Oh, you were quite right to refuse.

LADY KELSEY.

I thought it would only go in senseless extravagances as all the rest has gone, and when he said it was a matter of life and death, I couldn't believe it. He'd said that so often.

CARBERY.

It's shocking to think a man of his position and abilities should have come to such a pass.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Dear Mr. Carbery, don't draw the very obvious moral. We're all quite wretched enough as it is.

LADY KELSEY.

And two days later Lucy came to me with a white face to say that he had been arrested for forging a cheque.

CARBERY.

I only met him once, and I'm bound to say I thought him a most charming man.

LADY KELSEY.

Ah, that's what ruined him. He was always so entirely delightful. He could never say no to any one. But there's not an atom of harm in him. I'm quite certain he's never done anything criminal; he may have been foolish, but wicked never.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Of course he'll be able to clear himself. There's not the least doubt about that.

LADY KELSEY.

But think of the disgrace of it. A public trial. And Fred Allerton of all people! The Allertons were always so proud of their family. It was almost a mania with them.

MRS. CROWLEY.

For centuries they've cherished the firm belief that there was no one in the county fit to black their boots.

CARBERY.

Pride goeth before a fall.

MRS. CROWLEY.

[*Smiling.*] And proverbs before a clergyman.

LADY KELSEY.

They wouldn't give him bail, so he's remained in prison till now. Of course, I made Lucy and George come here.

MRS. CROWLEY.

You've been quite charming, Lady Kelsey, as every one knew you'd be. But don't think of those wretched

weeks of suspense. Think only that Mr. Allerton has got his chance at last. Why, the trial may be over now, and he may this very minute be on his way to this house.

CARBERY.

What will he do when it's over? The position will be surely a little unpleasant.

LADY KELSEY.

I've talked it over with Lucy, and—I've made it possible for them all to go abroad. They'll need rest and quiet. Poor things, poor things!

CARBERY.

I suppose Miss Allerton and George are at the Old Bailey.

LADY KELSEY.

No, their father begged them to stay away. They've been in all day, waiting for the papers.

MRS. CROWLEY.

But who is going to bring you the news? Surely you're not going to wait for the papers?

LADY KELSEY.

Oh, no, Dick Lomas is coming. He's one of the witnesses for Fred, and my nephew Bobby Boulger.

MRS. CROWLEY.

And what about Mr. Maekenzie? He told me he would be there.

CARBERY.

Is that the great traveller? I thought I saw in the paper that he'd already started for Africa.

LADY KELSEY.

Not yet. He's going at the beginning of the month. Oh, he's been so good to us during this time. All our friends have been good to us.

CARBERY.

I shouldn't have thought there was much of the milk of human kindness to overflow in Alexander Mackenzie. By all accounts he dealt with the slave-traders in Africa with a good deal of vigour.

MRS. CROWLEY.

The slave-traders must be quaking in their shoes if they know he's starting out again, for he's made up his mind to exterminate them, and when Alec Mackenzie makes up his mind to do a thing, he appears to do it.

LADY KELSEY.

He has the reputation of a hard man, but no one could be more delightful than he has been to me.

MRS. CROWLEY.

I don't think I like him, but he's certainly a strong man, and in England just now every one's so weak and floppy, it's rather a relief to come across somebody who's got a will of iron and nerves of steel.

[GEORGE ALLERTON *comes in. He is a very young man, good-looking, though at the moment pale and haggard, with a rather weak face.*

GEORGE.

I thought Lucy was here. [To CARBERY and MRS. CROWLEY.] How d'you do? Have you seen Lucy?

MRS. CROWLEY.

I went to her room for a moment.

GEORGE.

What is she doing?

MRS. CROWLEY.

Reading.

GEORGE.

I wish I could take it as calmly as she does. An outsider would think there was nothing the matter at all. Oh, it's too awful!

LADY KELSEY.

My dear, you must bear up. We must all hope for the best.

GEORGE.

But there is no best. Whatever happens, it means disgrace and dishonour. How could he? How could he?

LADY KELSEY.

No one knows your father as I do, George. I'm

sure he's never been anything but thoughtless and foolish.

GEORGE.

Of course he's not been actually criminal. That's absurd. But it's bad enough as it is.

MRS. CROWLEY.

You mustn't take it too much to heart. In another half-hour at the utmost your father will be here with everything cleared up, and you'll be able to go back to Oxford with a clear conscience.

GEORGE.

Do you think I can go to Oxford again when my father has been tried for forgery? No, no! No, no! I'd rather shoot myself.

LADY KELSEY.

My poor boy . . . Where have you been all day?

GEORGE.

Heaven knows! I've walked through the streets till I'm dog-tired. Oh, the suspense is too awful. My feet carried me to the Old Bailey, and I would have given anything to go in and see how things were going, but I'd promised the Pater I wouldn't.

LADY KELSEY.

How did he look this morning?

GEORGE.

He was most awfully worn and ill. I don't believe

he'll ever get over it. I saw his counsel before the case began. They told me it was bound to come all right.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Is there anything in the evening papers?

GEORGE.

I haven't dared to look. The placards are awful.

CARBERY.

Why, what do they say?

GEORGE.

Can't you imagine? "Gentleman charged with forgery." "County gentleman at the Old Bailey." And all the rest of it. Damn them! Damn them!

LADY KELSEY.

It may be all over by now.

GEORGE.

I feel that I shall never sleep again. I couldn't close my eyes last night. To think that one's own father . . .

LADY KELSEY.

For goodness' sake be quiet.

GEORGE.

[*Starting.*] There's a ring at the bell.

LADY KELSEY.

I've given orders that no one is to be admitted but Dick Lomas and Bobbie.

MRS. CROWLEY.

It must be finished by now. It's one or the other of them come to tell you the result.

LADY KELSEY.

Oh, I'm so frightfully anxious.

GEORGE.

Aunt, you don't think . . .

LADY KELSEY.

No, no, of course not. They *must* find him not guilty.

[*The BUTLER enters followed by DICK LOMAS, a clean-shaven dapper man, with a sharp face and good-natured smile. He is between thirty-five and forty, but slim and youthful. With him comes SIR ROBERT BOULGER, LADY KELSEY'S nephew, a good-looking, spruce youth of twenty-two.*]

BUTLER.

Mr. Lomas, Sir Robert Boulger.

GEORGE.

[*Excitedly.*] Well, well? For God's sake tell us quickly.

DICK.

My dear people, I have nothing to tell.

GEORGE.

Oh!

[He staggers with sudden faintness and falls to the floor.]

DICK.

Hulloa! What's this?

MRS. CROWLEY.

Poor boy!

[They crowd round him.]

GEORGE.

It's all right. What a fool I am! I was so strung up.

DICK.

You'd better come to the window.

[He and BOULGER take the boy's arms and lead him to the window. GEORGE leans against the balcony.]

CARBERRY.

I'm afraid I must go away. Every Wednesday at four I read *Little Lord Fauntleroy* to forty charwomen.

LADY KELSEY.

Good-bye. And thanks so much for coming.

MRS. CROWLEY.

[*Shaking hands with him.*] Good-bye. A clergyman always helps one so much to bear other people's misfortunes.

[CARBERY goes out, and in a moment ROBERT BOULGER comes back into the room.]

LADY KELSEY.

Is he better?

BOULGER.

Oh, much. He'll be all right in a minute. [LADY KELSEY goes to the window, and he turns to MRS. CROWLEY.] You are a brick to come here to-day, when they're all in such awful trouble.

MRS. CROWLEY.

[*With a little hesitation.*] Did you really come away before the trial was ended?

BOULGER.

Why, of course. What did you think? You don't imagine they'll convict him?

MRS. CROWLEY.

It's too dreadful.

BOULGER.

Where is Lucy? I was hoping to get a glimpse of her.

MRS. CROWLEY.

I wouldn't trouble her to-day if I were you. I think she most wants to be left alone.

BOULGER.

I wanted to tell her that if I could do anything at all, she had only to command.

MRS. CROWLEY.

I think she knows that. But I'll give her the message if you like. . . . You're very devoted.

BOULGER.

I've been madly in love with her ever since I was ten.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Take care then. There's nothing so tedious as the constant lover.

[DICK comes into the room and speaks to
ROBERT BOULGER.

DICK.

George is quite well now. He wants you to smoke a cigarette with him.

BOULGER.

Certainly. [He goes on to the balcony.

DICK.

[When BOULGER is gone.] At least, he will the moment he sees you.

MRS. CROWLEY.

What do you mean by that?

DICK.

Merely that I wanted to talk to you. And Robert Boulger, being a youth of somewhat limited intelligence, seemed in the way.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Why did you leave the Old Bailey?

DICK.

My dear lady, I couldn't stand it. You don't know what it is to sit there and watch a man tortured, a man you've known all your life, whom you've dined with times out of number, in whose house you've stayed. He had just the look of a hunted beast, and his face was grey with terror.

MRS. CROWLEY.

How was the case going?

DICK.

I couldn't judge. I could only see those haggard, despairing eyes.

MRS. CROWLEY.

But you're a barrister. You must have heard his answers. What did he reply to all the questions?

DICK.

He seemed quite dazed. I don't think he took in the gist of his cross-examination.

MRS. CROWLEY.

But the man's innocent.

DICK.

Yes, we all hope that.

MRS. CROWLEY.

What d'you mean? There can be no doubt about that. When he was arrested Lucy went to him and begged him to tell her the exact truth. He swore that he wasn't guilty.

DICK.

Poor Lucy! She's borne up wonderfully. She'll stick to her father through thick and thin.

MRS. CROWLEY.

[*Abruptly.*] Mr. Lomas, you're trying to put me off. It's not fair to let Lucy buoy herself up with false hopes. She's absolutely convinced that her father will be acquitted.

DICK.

Well, in another half-hour we shall all know. When I left, the judge was just going to sum up.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Mr. Lomas, what is your opinion?

[*He looks at her steadily for a moment.*]

DICK.

Were you very much surprised when you heard Fred Allerton was arrested?

MRS. CROWLEY.

Good heavens, I was overwhelmed!

DICK.

[*Dryly.*] Ah!

MRS. CROWLEY.

If you aggravate me I shall box your ears.

DICK.

When first I knew Fred he was a very rich man. You know that the Allertons are one of the oldest families in Cheshire?

MRS. CROWLEY.

Yes. I think Lucy's only failing is an inordinate pride in her family. She thinks it very snobbish to have any particular respect for a peer of the realm, but only natural to look up to persons of good family.

DICK.

Ah, you see, you and I who have a quite indecent lack of ancestors, can't realise what the cult of family may be. There are families in the remote parts of England—not very rich, not very clever, and not very good-looking—who would look askance at a belted earl who came to demand their daughter's hand in marriage. They have a natural conviction that they're the salt of the earth, and in their particular corner they rule more absolutely than half the monarchs in Europe. The Allertons were like that. But Fred somehow seemed to belong to a different stock. The first thing he did was to play ducks and drakes with his fortune.

MRS. CROWLEY.

But men ought to be extravagant. That's what they're there for.

DICK.

Women always took his side because he had an irresistible charm of manner.

MRS. CROWLEY.

I think George has, too, a little.

DICK.

I hope for Luey's sake he will turn out a different man from his father. I wish he weren't so like him in appearance. At last Fred Allerton had squandered every penny, and he married Lady Kelsey's sister, one of the three rich daughters of a Liverpool merchant. But he ran through her money, too, gambling, racing, and so forth, and she died of a broken heart—adoring him still.

MRS. CROWLEY.

You're as well informed as an encyclopædia, Mr. Lomas.

DICK.

You see, I was made the trustee for the poor remains of Mrs. Allerton's fortune, and I know how Lucy has managed to keep all their heads above water. She's wonderful. Ever since she was a child she's held the reins in her own hands. She's stuck to her father, though Lady Kelsey implored her to

leave him to his own foolish ways. She saw that George was decently educated. She hid from the world all the little shifts and devices to which she had to resort in order to keep up an appearance of decency.

MRS. CROWLEY.

I suppose you, too, think Fred Allerton little better than a scamp?

DICK.

My dear lady, when a man has had to leave his club because he plays cards too well, it's at least permissible to suppose that there's something odd about him.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Here's Lady Kelsey. For heaven's sake try and amuse her a little.

[LADY KELSEY comes back into the room.

LADY KELSEY.

Oh, Dick, I'm so full of my own troubles, I forgot to ask about yours. I'm so sorry to hear that you're ill.

DICK.

On the contrary, I'm in the very best of health.

LADY KELSEY.

But I saw in the papers that you were going to give up your seat in the House owing to ill-health.

DICK.

Of course, I'd forgotten. My heart is seriously deranged.

MRS. CROWLEY.

How dreadful! What is the matter with it?

DICK.

Can you ask? I've banged it about at your feet so long that its functions are excessively impaired. And it's beaten all my waistcoats out of shape.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Don't be so foolish. I was quite alarmed.

DICK.

I'm going to retire.

LADY KELSEY.

From the bar as well?

DICK.

From the bar as well. Henceforth I shall cultivate only such arts and graces as are proper to the man of leisure. My fellow men are a great deal too strenuous, and I propose to offer them the spectacle of a complete idler who demands from the world neither honours nor profit, but only entertainment.

MRS. CROWLEY.

D'you mean to say you're going to give up a large practice and a position which may be very important merely to gratify a foolish whim?

DICK.

I haven't time to work. Life is so much too short. A little while ago it occurred to me that I was nearly forty. [*To Mrs. Crowley.*] D'you know the feeling?

MRS. CROWLEY.

No, of course not. Don't be so uncivil.

DICK.

By the way, how old are you?

MRS. CROWLEY.

Twenty-nine!

DICK.

Nonsense! There's no such age.

MRS. CROWLEY.

I beg your pardon, upper parlourmaids are always twenty-nine.

DICK.

For years I've spent eight hours a day meddling with silly persons' silly quarrels, and eight hours more governing the nation. I've never been able to spend more than half my income. I'm merely working myself to death in order to leave a fortune to my nieces, two desperately plain girls with red noses.

LADY KELSEY.

But what are you going to do?

DICK.

Oh, I don't know. Perhaps I'll try my hand at big game shooting, if Alee will take me on this expedition of his. I've always thought shooting would be an agreeable pastime if partridges were the size of well-grown sheep and pheasants a little larger than a cow.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Then the breakdown in your health is all humbug?

DICK.

Absolute humbug. If I were to tell the truth people would shut me up in a lunatic asylum. I've come to the conclusion that there's only one game in the world worth playing, and that's the game of life. I'm rich enough to devote myself to it entirely.

MRS. CROWLEY.

But you'll get bored to death.

DICK.

Not I! Why, I'm growing younger every day. My dear Mrs. Crowley, I don't feel a day more than eighteen.

MRS. CROWLEY.

You certainly look quite twenty-five.

DICK.

I haven't a white hair in my head.

MRS. CROWLEY.

I suppose your servant plucks them out every morning.

DICK.

Oh, very rarely. One a month at the outside.

MRS. CROWLEY.

I think I see one on the left temple.

DICK.

Really! How careless of Charles! I must speak to him.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Let me pluck it out.

DICK.

I shall allow you to do nothing so familiar.

[GEORGE *comes hurriedly into the room.*

GEORGE.

There's Alec Mackenzie. He's just driven up in a cab.

DICK.

He must have come from the trial. Then it's all over.

LADY KELSEY.

Quick! Go to the stairs, or Miller won't let him up.

[GEORGE *runs across the room and opens the door.*

GEORGE.

[*Calling.*] Miller, Miller, Mr. Mackenzie's to come up.

[LUCY ALLERTON, *hearing a commotion, comes in. She is older than George, a tall girl, white now, with eyes heavy from want of sleep. She has lived in the country all her life, and has brought up to London a sort of remoteness from the world. She is beautiful in a very English manner, and her clear-cut features are an index to a character in which the moral notions are peculiarly rigid. Self-control is a quality which she possesses in a marked degree, and one which she enormously admires in others.*

LUCY.

Who is it?

GEORGE.

It's Alec Mackenzie. He's come from the trial!

LUCY.

Then it's finished at last. [*She shakes hands with Dick.*] It's so good of you to come.

BOULGER.

You're perfectly wonderful, Lucy. How can you be so calm?

LUCY.

Because I'm quite sure of the result. D'you imagine I'd doubt my father for a moment?

DICK.

Oh, Lucy, for heaven's sake don't be so sure. You must be prepared for everything.

LUCY.

Oh, no, I know my father. D'you think I've not studied him during these years that I've looked after him? He's a child, with all a child's thoughtlessness and simplicity. And God knows, he's weak. I know his faults better than any one, but it would be impossible for him to do anything criminal.

[The BUTLER enters, followed by ALEC MACKENZIE. ALEC is a tall, wiry man, well-knit, with dark hair and a small red moustache and beard, cut close to the face. He is about five-and-thirty. He has great ease of manner, and there is about him an air as though he were accustomed that people should do as he told them.]

BUTLER.

Mr. Mackenzie!

GEORGE.

Is it finished? For God's sake tell us quickly, old man.

LUCY.

Why didn't father come with you? Is he following?

ALEC.

Yes, it's all over.

LADY KELSEY.

Thank goodness. The suspense was really too dreadful.

GEORGE.

I knew they'd acquit him. Thank God!

DICK.

[*Looking at ALEC's face.*] Take care, George.

[*Suddenly LUCY goes up to ALEC and looks at him. An expression of horror distorts her features.*]

MRS. CROWLEY.

Lucy, what is it?

ALEC.

I don't know how I am going to tell you.

LUCY.

You say the trial was over when you came away?

ALEC.

Yes.

LUCY.

The jury had given their verdict?

GEORGE.

Lucy, what are you driving at? You don't think . . . ?

ALEC.

Your father asked me to come and break it to you.

GEORGE.

He's not dead?

ALEC.

Perhaps it would be better if he were.

LUCY.

They found him guilty?

ALEC.

Yes.

GEORGE.

[*With a groan of despair.*] Oh! But it's impossible.

LUCY.

[*Putting her hand on his arm.*] Ssh!

LADY KELSEY.

My God, my God! I'm thankful that his wife is dead.

LUCY.

I'm awfully stupid, but if he was innocent, how could they find him guilty? I don't know what you mean.

ALEC.

I am afraid it's very clear.

LUCY.

There must be some horrible mistake.

ALEC.

I wish there were.

GEORGE.

[*Breaking down into tears and sinking into a chair.*]
Oh, God! What shall I do?

LUCY.

Don't do that, George. We want all our calmness now.

GEORGE.

Don't you see they all expected it? It was only you and I who believed in his innocence.

LUCY.

[*To ALEC.*] Did you hear the evidence?

ALEC.

Yes.

LUCY.

And you followed it carefully?

ALEC.

Very.

LUCY.

What impression did it leave on your mind?

ALEC.

What can it matter how it affected me?

LUCY.

I want to know.

DICK.

Lucy, you're torturing us all.

LUCY

If you had been on the jury would your verdict have been the same as theirs ?

ALEC.

I should have been obliged to judge according to my conscience.

LUCY.

I see. And you have no doubt that he was guilty ?

ALEC.

Don't ask me these horrible questions.

LUCY.

But it's very important. I know that you are a perfectly honest and upright man. If you think he was guilty, there is nothing more to be said.

ALEC.

The case was so plain that the jury were not out of the box for more than ten minutes.

LUCY.

Did the judge say anything ?

ALEC.

[*Hesitatingly.*] He said there could be no doubt about the justice of the verdict.

LUCY.

What else? . . . [*He looks at her without answering.*]
You had better tell me now. I shall see it in the papers to-morrow.

ALEC.

[*As though the words were dragged out of him.*]
He called it a very mean and shameful crime, worse than another man's because your father was a gentleman of ancient family and bore a name of great honour.

DICK.

[*To Mrs. CROWLEY.*] These judges have a weakness for pointing a moral.

LUCY.

And what was the sentence? [*A pause.*] Well?

ALEC.

Seven years' penal servitude.

GEORGE.

Oh, God!

DICK.

My dear girl, I can't tell you how sorry I am.

LADY KELSEY.

Lucy, what is it? You frighten me.

LUCY.

Try and bear up, George. We want all the strength we've got, you and I.

[*Mrs. CROWLEY puts her arms round LUCY and kisses her.*]

MRS. CROWLEY.

Oh, my dear, my dear!

LUCY.

[*Disengaging herself.*] You're all very kind, and I know you sympathise with me. . . .

MRS. CROWLEY.

[*Interrupting her.*] You know that we'll do everything we can to help you.

LUCY.

It's so good of you. There's really nothing that any one can do. Would you all mind leaving me alone with George? We must talk this over by ourselves.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Very well. Mr. Lomas, will you put me into a cab?

DICK.

Certainly. [*To LUCY.*] Good-bye, dear, and God bless you.

LUCY.

[*Shaking hands with him.*] Don't worry too much about me. If there's anything I want, I'll let you know.

DICK.

Thanks. [*He goes out with MRS. CROWLEY.*]

ALEC.

May I speak to you for a few minutes alone?

LUCY.

Not now, Mr. Mackenzie. I don't want to seem rude, but . . .

ALEC.

[*Interrupting.*] I know, and I wouldn't insist unless it were a matter of the most urgent importance.

LUCY.

Very well. George, will you take Aunt Alice to her room? I shall want you in a moment.

GEORGE.

Yes.

LUCY.

[*To LADY KELSEY.*] Won't you lie down and try and sleep a little? You must be dreadfully exhausted.

LADY KELSEY.

Ah, don't think of me now, dear. Think of yourself.

LUCY.

[*Smiling.*] It's purely selfish. It eases me a little to fuss about you.

GEORGE.

I'll wait in the smoking-room, Lucy.

LUCY.

Do!

[GEORGE and LADY KELSEY go out.]

ALEC.

I think your self-command is wonderful. I've never admired you more than at this moment.

LUCY.

You make me feel such a prig. It's not really very strange if I keep my head, because I've had an immensely long training. Since I was fifteen I've been alone to care for George and my father. . . . Won't you sit down?

ALEC.

I can say what I want in a very few words. You know that in a week I start for Mombassa to take charge of the expedition in North-East Africa. I may be away for three or four years, and I shall be exposed to a certain amount of danger. When I left Africa last time to gather supplies, I determined I would crush those wretched slave-traders, and now I think I have the means to do it.

LUCY.

I think you are engaged on a very great work.

ALEC.

I don't know whether you ever noticed that—that I cared more for you than for any one in the world. But with the long^{er} journey in front of me I didn't think it was right to say anything to you. It wasn't fair to ask you to bind yourself during my long absence. And there was always the risk that a stray bullet might put an end to me. I made up my mind that I must wait till I returned. But

things have changed now. Lucy, I love you with all my heart. Will you marry me before I go?

LUCY.

No, I can't do that. It's very generous of you, but I couldn't.

ALEC.

Why not? Don't you know that I love you? It would help me so much if I knew that you were waiting for me at home.

LUCY.

I must look after my father. I shall go and live near the—prison, so that I can see him whenever it's possible.

ALEC.

You can do that as well if you're my wife. . . . You have before you a very difficult and trying time. Won't you let me help you?

LUCY.

I couldn't. Heaven knows, I'm grateful to you for offering to marry me on this day of my bitter humiliation. I shall never forget your great kindness. But I must stand alone. I must devote myself to my father. When he's released I must have a home to bring him to, and I must tend him and care for him. Ah, now he wants me more than ever.

ALEC.

You're very proud.

LUCY.

[*Giving him her hand.*] Dear friend, don't think hardly of me. I think I love you as much as it's possible for a woman to love a man.

ALEC.

Lucy!

LUCY.

[*With a smile.*] Did you want me to tell you that in so many words? I admire you, and I trust you. I should be very happy if George could grow into so brave and honest a man as you.

ALEC.

They're very modest crumbs with which you want me to be satisfied.

LUCY.

I know in your heart you think I'm right. You would never seek to dissuade me from what I'm convinced is my duty.

ALEC.

Can't I do anything for you at all?

[*She looks at him for a moment intently. She rings the bell.*]

LUCY.

Yes, you can do me the greatest possible service.

ALEC.

I'm so glad. What is it you mean?

LUCY.

Wait, and I'll tell you. [*The BUTLER enters.*] Ask Mr. George to come here, please.

BUTLER.

Very well, Miss.

[*He goes out.*]

LUCY.

I want you to help me.

[*GEORGE comes in.*]

GEORGE.

Yes, Lucy?

LUCY.

I want to give into your charge what I love most in the world. . . . George, have you thought at all what you're going to do now? I'm afraid you can't go back to Oxford.

GEORGE.

No, I don't know what's to become of me. I wish I were dead.

LUCY.

An idea has just come to me. I'm going to ask Mr. Mackenzie to take you with him to Africa. Will you go?

GEORGE.

Yes, yes! I'd do anything to get away from England. I daren't face my friends—I'm too ashamed.

LUCY.

Ah, but it's not to hide yourself that I want you to go. Mr. Mackenzie, I daresay you know that we've

always been very proud of our name. And now it's hopelessly dishonoured.

GEORGE.

Lucy, for God's sake . . .

LUCY.

[*Turning to him.*] Now our only hope is in you. You have the opportunity of achieving a great thing. You can bring back the old name to its old honour. Oh, I wish I were a man. I can do nothing but wait and watch. If I could only fill you with my courage and with my ambition! Mr. Mackenzie, you asked if you could do anything for me. You can give George the chance of wiping out the shame of our family.

ALEC.

Do you know that he will have to suffer every sort of danger and privation, that often he will be parched by the heat, and often soaked to the skin for days together? Sometimes he'll not have enough to eat, and he'll have to work harder than a navvy.

LUCY.

Do you hear, George? Are you willing to go?

GEORGE.

I'll do anything you want me to, Lucy.

ALEC.

And you know that he may get killed. There may be a good deal of fighting.

LUCY.

If he dies a brave man's death, I have nothing more to ask.

ALEC.

[*To GEORGE.*] Very well. Come with me, and I'll do my best for you.

LUCY.

Ah, thanks. You are really my friend.

ALEC.

And when I come back ?

LUCY.

Then, if you still care, ask your question again.

ALEC.

And the answer ?

LUCY.

[*With a little smile.*] The answer, perhaps, will be different.

END OF THE FIRST ACT

THE SECOND ACT

SCENE: ALEC MACKENZIE'S tent in North-East Africa.
It is night. The place is dimly lighted. There is a little camp bed in one corner with a mosquito net over it. There are two or three folding chairs, some tin cases, and a table. On this a gun is lying.

DICK is seated with his head on his hands, leaning on the table, fast asleep. DR. ADAMSON, the surgeon of the expedition, comes in. He is a large-boned brawny fellow with a Scotch accent. He looks at DICK and smiles.

DOCTOR.

Hulloa, there! [DICK starts up and seizes the gun. The DOCTOR laughs.] All right. Don't shoot. It's only me.

DICK.

[*With a laugh.*] Why the dickens did you wake me up? I was dreaming—dreaming of a high-heeled boot and a neat ankle, and the swish of a white lace petticoat.

DOCTOR.

I thought I'd just have a look at your arm.

DICK.

It's one of the most æsthetic sights I know.

DOCTOR.

Your arm ?

DICK.

* A pretty woman crossing Piccadilly at Swan and Edgar's. You are a savage, my good doctor, and a barbarian. You don't know the care and forethought, the hours of anxious meditation, it has needed for her to hold up that well-made skirt with the elegant grace which enchants you.

DOCTOR.

I'm afraid you're a very immoral man, Lomas.

DICK.

Ah, my dear fellow, at my time of life I have to content myself with condemning the behaviour of the younger generation. Even a camp bed in a stuffy tent with mosquitoes buzzing all around me has allurements greater than those of youth and beauty. And I declare for all women to hear that I am proof against their wiles. Give me a comfortable bed to sleep in, plenty to eat, tobacco to smoke, and Amaryllis may go hang.

DOCTOR.

Well, let's look at this wound of yours. Has it been throbbing at all ?

DICK.

Oh, it's not worth bothering about. It'll be all right to-morrow.

DOCTOR.

I'll put a clean dressing on all the same.

DICK.

All right. [*He takes off his coat and rolls up his sleeve. His arm is bandaged, and during the next speeches the DOCTOR puts on a dressing and a clean bandage.*] You must be pretty well done up, aren't you?

DOCTOR.

Just about dropping. But I've got a deuce of a lot more work before I turn in.

DICK.

The thing that amuses me is to remember that I came to Africa thinking I was going to have a rattling good time.

DOCTOR.

You couldn't exactly describe it as a picnic, could you? But I don't suppose any of us knew it would be such a tough job as it's turned out.

DICK.

My friend, if ever I return to my native land, I will never be such a crass and blithering idiot as to give way again to a spirit of adventure.

DOCTOR.

[*With a laugh.*] You're not the sort of chap whom one would expect to take to African work. Why the blazes did you come?

DICK.

That's precisely what I've been asking myself ever since we landed in this God-forsaken swamp.

DOCTOR.

The wound looks healthy enough. It'll hardly even leave a scar.

DICK.

I'm glad that my fatal beauty won't be injured. . . . You see, Alec's about the oldest friend I have. And then there's young Allerton, I've known him ever since he was a kid.

DOCTOR.

That's an acquaintance that most of us wouldn't boast about.

DICK.

I had an idea I'd like Bond Street all the better when I got back. I never knew that I should be eaten alive by every kind of disgusting animal by night and day. I say, Doctor, do you ever think of a rump steak?

DOCTOR.

When?

DICK.

[*With a wave of the hand.*] Sometimes, when we're marching under a sun that just about takes the roof of your head off, and we've had the scantiest and

most uncomfortable breakfast possible, I have a vision.

DOCTOR.

D'you mind only gesticulating with one arm?

DICK.

I see the dining-room of my club and myself sitting at a little table by the window looking out on Piccadilly, and there's a spotless tablecloth, and all the accessories are spick and span. An obsequious servant brings me a rump steak, grilled to perfection, and so tender that it melts in the mouth. And he puts by my side a plate of crisp, fried potatoes. Can't you smell them?

DOCTOR.

[*Laughing.*] Shut up!

DICK.

And then another obsequious servant brings me a pewter tankard, and into it he pours a bottle, a large bottle, mind you, of foaming ale.

DOCTOR.

You've certainly added considerably to our cheerfulness.

DICK.

[*With a shrug of the shoulders.*] I've often been driven to appease the pangs of raging hunger with a careless epigram, and by the laborious composition of a limerick I have sought to deceive a most unholy thirst.

DOCTOR.

Well, last night I thought you'd made your last joke, old man, and that I had given my last dose of quinine.

DICK.

We were in rather a tight corner, weren't we?

DOCTOR.

This is the third expedition I've gone with Mackenzie against the slave-raiders, and I promise you I've never been so certain that all was over with us.

DICK.

Funny thing death is, you know. When you think of it beforehand, it makes you squirm in your shoes, but when you've just got it face to face, it seems so obvious that you forget to be afraid. It's one of my principles never to be impressed by a platitude.

DOCTOR.

It's only by a miracle we escaped. If those Arabs hadn't hesitated to attack us just those ten minutes we should have been wiped out.

DICK.

Alec was splendid, wasn't he?

DOCTOR.

Yes, by Jove! He thought we were done for.

DICK.

What makes you think that?

DOCTOR.

Well, you see, I know him pretty well. He's been a pal of yours for twenty years in England, but I've been with him out here three times, and I tell you there's not much about a man that you don't know then.

DICK.

Well ?

DOCTOR.

Well, when things are going smoothly and everything's flourishing, he's apt to be a bit irritable. He keeps rather to himself, and he doesn't say much unless you do something he doesn't approve of.

DICK.

And then, by Jove, he comes down on one like a thousand of bricks. It's not for nothing the natives call him Thunder and Lightning.

DOCTOR.

But when things begin to look black, his spirits go up like one o'clock. And the worse they are, the more cheerful he is.

DICK.

It's one of his most irritating characteristics.

DOCTOR.

When every one is starving with hunger, and dead tired, and soaked to the skin, Mackenzie fairly bubbles over with good-humour.

DICK.

When I'm in a bad temper, I much prefer every one else to be in a bad temper too.

DOCTOR.

These last few days, he's been positively hilarious. Yesterday he was cracking jokes with the natives.

DICK.

[*Dryly.*] Scotch jokes. I daresay they sound funny in an African dialect.

DOCTOR.

I've never seen him more cheerful. I said to myself: By the Lord Harry, the chief thinks we're in a devil of a bad way.

DICK.

Thank Heaven, it's all over now. We've none of us had any sleep for three days, and when I once get off, I don't mean to wake up for a week.

DOCTOR.

I must go and see the rest of my patients. Perkins has got a bad dose of fever this time. He was quite delirious a while ago.

DICK.

By Jove, I'd almost forgotten. How one changes out here! Here am I feeling happy and comfortable and inclined to make a little jest or two, and I've forgotten already that poor Richardson is dead and Lord knows how many natives.

DOCTOR.

Poor chap, we could ill spare him. The fates never choose the right man.

DICK.

What do you mean by that?

DOCTOR.

If we had to lose some one, it would have been a damned sight better if that young cub had got the bullet which killed poor Richardson.

DICK.

George Allerton?

DOCTOR.

He wouldn't have been much loss, would he?

DICK.

No, I'm afraid he wouldn't.

DOCTOR.

Mackenzie has been very patient with him. I wonder he didn't send him back to the coast months ago, when he sacked Macinnery.

DICK.

Poor George, everything has been against him.

DOCTOR.

Some men have got natures so crooked that with every chance in the world to go straight they can't

manage it. The only thing is to let them go to the devil as best they may.

DICK.

Alec was bound to give him another chance. [ALEC MACKENZIE *comes in.*] Hulloo, Alec! Where have you been?

ALEC.

I've been going the round of the outlying sentries.

DICK.

All serene?

ALEC.

Yes. I've just seen a native messenger that Mindabi sent to me.

DOCTOR.

Anything important?

ALEC.

[*Curtly.*] Yes. How's the arm, Dick?

DICK.

Oh, that's nothing. It's only a scratch.

ALEC.

You'd better not make too light of it. The smallest wound has a way of being troublesome in this country.

DOCTOR.

He'll be all right in a day or two.

ALEC.

How are the others?

DOCTOR.

They're going on pretty well on the whole. Perkins, of course, will be down for some days longer. And some of the natives are rather badly hurt. Those devils have got explosive bullets.

ALEC.

Any one in great danger?

DOCTOR.

No, I don't think so. There are two men who are in rather a bad way, but all they want is rest.

ALEC.

I see.

DICK.

I say, have you had anything to eat lately?

ALEC.

[*With a laugh.*] Good Lord! I quite forgot. I wonder when the dickens I had some food last.

DICK.

[*Smiling.*] You've had nothing to-day, have you?

ALEC.

No, I don't think so. Those Arabs kept us so confoundedly busy.

DICK.

You must be devilish hungry.

ALEC.

Now you mention it, I think I am. And thirsty, by Jove! I wouldn't give my thirst for an elephant tusk.

DICK.

And to think there's nothing but tepid water to drink!

DOCTOR.

I'll go and tell the boy to bring you some food. It's a rotten game to play tricks with your digestion like that.

ALEC.

[*Gaily.*] Stern man, the doctor, isn't he? It won't hurt me once in a way. And I shall enjoy it all the more now.

DOCTOR.

[*Calling.*] Selim!

ALEC.

No, don't trouble. The poor chap's just turned in, dropping with sleep. I told him he might till I called him. I don't want much, and I can easily get it myself. [*He goes to a case and takes out a tin of meat and some ship's biscuits.*] It's rather a nuisance that we've not been able to get any game lately.

[*He sets the food down before him, sits down, and begins to eat.*]

DICK.

[*Ironically.*] Appetising, isn't it?

ALEC.

Splendid!

DICK.

You have all the instincts of the primeval savage, Alec. It enrages and disgusts me.

ALEC.

[*With a laugh.*] Why?

DICK.

You take food for the gross and bestial purpose of appeasing your hunger. You have no appreciation for the delicacies of eating as a fine art.

ALEC.

The meat's getting rather mouldy, isn't it?

DICK.

Damnably! It's been a source of great anxiety to me in England.

ALEC.

What is he talking about now?

DICK.

I was going on with the thread of my observations, which you interrupted with the entirely obvious remark that the tinned meat was getting mouldy.

ALEC.

I apologise profusely. Pray go on!

DICK.

I was about to observe that even in England you will eat the most carefully ordered meal with an indifference which is an outrage to decency. Indeed, you pay less attention to it than here, because at all events you do notice that the meat is mouldy. But if any one gives you a good dinner, you notice nothing. I've given him priceless port, Doctor, and he drank it as though it were cooking sherry.

DOCTOR.

I confess it is lamentable. But why is it a source of anxiety to you?

DICK.

What on earth is to happen to him in his old age?

ALEC.

Explain yourself, my friend. Clearly but with as much brevity as possible.

DICK.

The pleasure of eating is the only pleasure that remains to the old. Love—what is love when you lose your figure, and your hair grows thin? Knowledge—one can never know everything, and the desire passes with the fire of youth. Even ambition fails you in the end. But to those who have lived wisely and well, there remain three

pleasures every day of their lives: their breakfast, their luncheon, and their dinner.

ALEC.

[*With a laugh.*] I wouldn't worry about my old age if I were you, Dick.

DICK.

Why?

ALEC.

Because I think it's ten to one that we shall all be dead to-morrow morning.

DOCTOR.

What?

[*There is a slight pause while both men stare at him.*]

DICK.

Is this one of your little jokes, Alec?

ALEC.

You have often observed that I joke with difficulty.

DOCTOR.

But what's wrong now?

ALEC.

You'll neither of you sleep in your beds to-night. Another sell for the mosquitoes, isn't it? I propose to break up the camp and start marching as soon as the moon goes down.

DICK.

I say, it's a bit thick after a day like this. We're all so done up that we shan't be able to go a mile.

ALEC.

Nonsense, you will have had two hours' rest.

DOCTOR.

But some of those fellows who are wounded can't possibly be moved.

ALEC.

They must !

DOCTOR.

I won't answer for their lives.

ALEC.

We must take the risk. Our only chance is to make a bold dash for it, and we can't leave the wounded here.

DICK.

I suppose there's going to be a deuce of a row ?

ALEC.

[*Grimly.*] There is.

DICK.

Your companions seldom have a chance to complain of the monotony of their existence, Alec. What are you going to do now ?

ALEC.

At this moment, I'm going to fill my pipe.

[*There is a pause while ALEC fills and lights his pipe.*]

DICK.

I gather from the general amiability of your demeanour that we're in a rather tight place?

ALEC.

Tighter than any of your patent-leather boots, my friend.

DICK.

[*Gravely*] Have we any chance of getting through, old man?

ALEC.

[*Lightly.*] Oh, I don't know. There's always a chance.

DICK.

Don't grin at me in that irritating fashion.

ALEC.

You must wish you were treading the light fantastic toe in a London ball-room, Dick.

DICK.

Frankly I do. . . I suppose we're going to fight again?

ALEC.

Like Kilkenny cats.

DICK.

[*Bristly.*] Well, at all events that's some comfort. If I am going to be done out of my night's rest, I should like to take it out of some one.

ALEC.

If things turn out all right, we shall have come near finishing the job, and there won't be much more slave-raiding in this part of Africa.

DICK.

And if things don't turn out all right?

ALEC.

Why, then I'm afraid the tea-tables of Mayfair will be deprived of your scintillating repartee for ever.

DICK.

Well, I've had a very good time in my life. I've loved a little, I've looked at some good pictures, read some thundering fine books, and I've worked and played. If I can only account for a few more of those damned scoundrels before I die, I shouldn't think I had much to complain of.

ALEC.

[*Smiling.*] You're a philosopher, Dick.

DICK.

Doesn't the possibility of an extremely unpleasant demise tempt you to a few appropriate reflections?

ALEC.

I don't know that it does. I'm a bit of a fatalist, and my theory is that when my time comes nothing can help me, but at the bottom of my heart I can't resist the conviction that I shan't die till I let myself.

DOCTOR.

Well, I must go and put things in order. I'll bandage those fellows up, and I hope they'll stand the jolting.

ALEC.

What about Perkins?

DOCTOR.

Lord knows! I'll try and keep him quiet with chloral.

ALEC.

You needn't say anything about striking camp. I don't propose that any one should know till a quarter of an hour before we start.

DOCTOR.

But that won't give them time.

ALEC.

It must. I've trained them often enough to get on the march quickly.

DOCTOR.

Very well.

[GEORGE ALLERTON *comes in as the DOCTOR is on the point of going.*

GEORGE.

Can I come in ?

ALEC.

Yes . . . Doctor !

DOCTOR.

Hulloa !

ALEC.

You might stay a minute, will you ?

DOCTOR.

[*Coming back.*] Certainly.

ALEC.

Didn't Selim tell you that I wanted to speak to you ?

GEORGE.

That's why I've come.

ALEC.

You've taken your time about it.

GEORGE.

I say, could you give me a drink of brandy ? I'm awfully done up.

ALEC.

[*Shortly.*] There's no brandy left.

GEORGE.

Hasn't the doctor got some ?

ALEC.

No!

[*There is a pause. ALEC looks at him slowly.*]

GEORGE.

Why are you all looking at me like that? You look as if you were going to try me for something.

DICK.

Nonsense! Don't be so nervous.

ALEC.

[*Abruptly.*] Do you know anything about the death of that Turkana woman?

GEORGE.

No! How should I?

ALEC.

Come now, you must know something about it. Last Tuesday you came into camp and told me the Turkana were very excited.

GEORGE.

[*Unwillingly.*] Oh, yes! I remember something about it. It had slipped my memory.

ALEC.

Well?

GEORGE.

I'm not very clear about it. The woman had been shot, hadn't she? One of our station boys had been

playing the fool with her, and he seems to have shot her.

ALEC.

Have you made no inquiries as to who the man was ?

GEORGE.

[*In a surly way.*] I haven't had time. We've all been worked off our legs during these three days.

ALEC.

Do you suspect no one ?

GEORGE.

I don't think so.

ALEC.

Think a moment.

GEORGE.

The only man who might have done it is that big scoundrel whom we got on the coast, the Swahili.

ALEC.

What makes you think that ?

GEORGE.

He's been making an awful nuisance of himself, and I know he was running after her.

ALEC.

I understand she complained about him to you ?

GEORGE.

Yes.

ALEC.

Do you think that would be enough evidence to punish him on?

GEORGE.

He's a thorough blackguard, and after all, if one does make a mistake, he's only a nigger.

ALEC.

You'll be surprised to hear that when the woman was found she wasn't dead.

[GEORGE gives a movement of consternation.]

ALEC.

She didn't die for nearly an hour.

GEORGE.

[After a short pause.] Was she able to say anything?

ALEC.

She accused you of having shot her.

GEORGE.

Me?

ALEC.

It appears that *you* were playing the fool with her, and when she got angry you took out a revolver and fired point blank. Presumably that she should tell no tales.

GEORGE.

It's a stupid lie. You know what they are. It's

just like them to tell an absurd lie like that. You wouldn't believe a parcel of niggers rather than me, would you? After all, my word's worth more than theirs.

ALEC.

[*Taking from his pocket an exploded cartridge.*] This was found about two yards from the body. As you see, it's a revolver cartridge. It was brought to me this evening.

GEORGE.

I don't know what that proves.

ALEC.

You know just as well as I do that none of our natives has a revolver. Besides ourselves only two or three of the servants have them.

[*GEORGE becomes white with fear. He takes out his handkerchief and wipes his face.*]

ALEC.

[*Quietly.*] Will you give me your revolver?

GEORGE.

I haven't got it. I lost it in the skirmish this afternoon. I didn't tell you as I thought you'd be annoyed.

ALEC.

I saw you cleaning it less than an hour ago.

GEORGE.

[*With a shrug of the shoulders.*] Perhaps it's in my tent, I'll go and see.

ALEC.

[*Sharply.*] Stop here.

GEORGE.

[*Angrily.*] You've no right to talk to me like that. I'm sick to death of being ordered about. You seem to think I'm a dog. I came out here of my own free will, and I won't let you treat me as if I were a servant.

ALEC.

If you put your hand to your hip pocket, I think you'll find your revolver there.

GEORGE.

I'm not going to give it to you.

ALEC.

[*Quietly.*] D'you want me to come and take it from you myself?

[*The two men stare at one another for a moment. Then GEORGE slowly puts his hand to his pocket. He takes out the revolver and suddenly aims at ALEC. DICK beats up his arm as he fires, and the DOCTOR, springing forward, seizes him round the waist. ALEC remains still.*]

DICK.

[*During the struggle.*] You young blackguard!

GEORGE.

Let me go, damn you!

ALEC.

You need not hold him.

[*They leave go of GEORGE, who sinks cowering into a chair. DICK hands the revolver to ALEC. He silently fits into a chamber the cartridge that had been brought to him.*

ALEC.

You see that it fits. Hadn't you better make a clean breast of it?

GEORGE.

[*Cowed.*] Yes, I shot her. She made a row, and the devil got into me. I didn't know I'd done anything till she screamed and I saw the blood . . . What a fool I was to throw the cartridge away! I wanted to have all the chambers charged.

ALEC.

Do you remember that two months ago I hanged a man to the nearest tree because he'd outraged a native woman?

GEORGE.

[*Springing up in terror.*] You wouldn't do that to me, Alec. Oh, God, no, Alec, have mercy on me. You wouldn't hang me. Oh, why did I ever come to this damned place?

ALEC.

You need not be afraid. I'm not going to do that. In any case I must preserve the native respect for the white man.

GEORGE.

I was half drunk when I saw that woman. I wasn't responsible for my actions.

ALEC.

The result is that the whole tribe has turned against us. The chief is my friend, and he sent a message to tell me he couldn't hold them in. It's from him I got the cartridge. It wouldn't be so serious, only the best fighting part of our forces are the Turkana, and we must expect treachery. They've stirred up the neighbouring tribes against us, and all the work we've been doing for a year is undone. That's the explanation of the Arabs' attack three days ago.

GEORGE.

[*Sullenly.*] I knew it was all my fault.

ALEC.

The natives have made up their minds to join the slave-traders, and we shall be attacked on all sides to-morrow. We can't hold out against God knows how many thousands.

GEORGE.

D'you mean you'll all be killed?

ALEC.

If we remain here there's no escape.

GEORGE.

[*In a whisper.*] What are you going to do to me, Alec?

[ALEC walks up and down the tent.]

ALEC.

[*Presently.*] I think you might go and see your patients now, doctor.

DOCTOR.

Very well.

DICK.

Shall I go too, Alec?

ALEC.

No, you can stay here. But don't open your mouth till you're spoken to.

[*THE DOCTOR goes out.*

GEORGE.

I'm sorry I did that silly thing just now. I'm glad I didn't hit you.

ALEC.

It doesn't matter at all. I'd forgotten all about it.

GEORGE.

I lost my head. I didn't know what I was doing.

ALEC.

You need not trouble about that. In Africa even the strongest people are apt to get excited and lose their balance.

[*ALEC re-lights his pipe, and there is a very short pause.*

ALEC.

Did you ever know that before we came away I asked Lucy to marry me?

GEORGE.

I knew you cared for her.

ALEC.

She asked me to bring you here in the hope that you would regain the good name of your family. I think that is the object she has most at heart in the world. It's as great as her love for you. The plan hasn't been much of a success, has it ?

GEORGE.

She ought to have known that I wasn't suited for this kind of life.

ALEC.

I saw very soon that you were weak and irresolute. But I hoped to make something of you. Your intentions seemed good enough, but you never had the strength to carry them out . . . I'm sorry if I seem to be preaching to you.

GEORGE.

[*Bitterly.*] Oh, d'you think I care what any one says to me now ?

ALEC.

[*Gravely, but not unkindly.*] Then I found you were drinking. I told you that no man could stand liquor in this country, and you gave me your word of honour that you wouldn't touch it again.

GEORGE.

Yes, I broke it. I couldn't help it ; the temptation was too strong.

ALEC.

When we came to the station at Muncas you and Macinnery got blind drunk, and the whole camp saw you. I ought to have sent you back to the coast then, but it would have broken Lucy's heart.

GEORGE.

It was Macinnery's fault.

ALEC.

It's because I thought he was to blame that I sent him back alone. I wanted to give you another chance. It struck me that the feeling of authority might have some influence on you, and so when we came to the lake I left you to guard the ferry. I put the chief part of the stores in your care and marched on. I needn't remind you what happened then.

[GEORGE looks down sulkily, and in default of excuses keeps silent.]

ALEC.

I came to the conclusion that it was hopeless. You seemed to me rotten through and through.

GEORGE.

[With a little laugh.] Like my father before me.

ALEC.

I couldn't believe a word you said. You did everything you shouldn't have done. The result was that the men mutinied, and if I hadn't come back in the

nick of time they'd have killed you and looted all the stores.

GEORGE.

You always blame me for everything. A man's not responsible for what he does when he's down with fever.

ALEC.

It was too late to send you back to the coast then, and I was obliged to take you on. And now the end has come. Your murder of that woman has put us all in deadly peril. Already to your charge lie the deaths of Richardson and almost twenty natives. Tribes that were friendly have joined with the Arabs, and we're as near destruction as we can possibly be.

GEORGE.

What are you going to do?

ALEC.

We're far away from the coast, and I must take the law into my own hands.

GEORGE.

[*With a gasp.*] You're not going to kill me?

ALEC.

Are you fond of Lucy?

GEORGE.

[*Brokenly.*] You—you know I am. Why d'you remind me of her now? I've made a rotten mess of everything, and I'm better out of the way. But think

of the disgrace of it. It'll kill Lucy. . . . And she was hoping I'd do so much.

ALEC.

Listen to me. Our only chance of escaping from the confounded fix we're in is to make a sudden attack on the Arabs before the natives join them. We shall be enormously outnumbered, but we may just smash them if we can strike to-night. My plan is to start marching as if I didn't know that the Turkana were going to turn against us. After an hour all the whites but one, and the Swahilis whom I can trust implicitly, will take a short cut. The Arabs will have had news of our starting, and they'll try to cut us off at the pass. I shall fall on them just as they begin to attack. D'you understand?

GEORGE.

Yes.

ALEC.

Now I must have one white man to head the Turkana, and that man will run the greatest possible danger. I'd go myself, only the Swahilis wont fight unless I lead them. . . . Are you willing to take that post?

GEORGE.

I?

ALEC.

I could order you, but the job's too dangerous for me to force it on any one. If you refuse, I shall call the others together and ask some one to volunteer.

In that case you will have to find your way back alone as best you can to the coast.

GEORGE.

No, no! Anything rather than the shame of that.

ALEC.

I won't hide from you that it means almost certain death. But there's no other way of saving ourselves. On the other hand, if you show perfect courage at the moment the Arabs attack and the Turkana find that we've given them the slip, you may escape. If you do, I promise nothing shall be said of all that has happened here.

GEORGE.

All right. I'll do that. And I thank you with all my heart for giving me the chance.

ALEC.

I'm glad you've accepted. Whatever happens you'll have done a brave action in your life. [*He holds out his hand to GEORGE, who takes it.*] I think there's nothing more to be said. You must be ready to start in half an hour. Here's your revolver. Remember that one chamber's empty. You'd better put in another cartridge.

GEORGE.

Yes, I'll do that.

[*He goes out.*]

DICK.

D'you think he has any chance of escaping?

ALEC.

If he has pluck he may get through.

DICK.

Well!

ALEC.

To-morrow we shall know if he has that last virtue of a blackguard!—courage.

DICK.

And if he hasn't, it's death you're sending him to?

ALEC.

Yes. It's death!

END OF THE SECOND ACT

THE THIRD ACT

SCENE: *A smoking-room at LADY KELSEY'S, leading by an archway into a drawing-room at the back. On the right is a glass door which leads into the garden. On one side is a sofa; on the other a table with cigarettes, matches, whiskey, sodas, etc.*

LADY KELSEY *is giving a dance, and the music of the Lancers is heard vaguely from the ball-room as the curtain rises.* MRS. CROWLEY and SIR ROBERT BOULGER *are sitting down.* LADY KELSEY *comes in with the* REV. JAMES CARBERY.

LADY KELSEY.

Oh, you wretched people, why aren't you dancing? It's too bad of you to hide yourselves here!

MRS. CROWLEY.

We thought no one would find us in the smoking-room. But why have you abandoned your guests, Lady Kelsey?

LADY KELSEY.

Oh, I've got them all comfortably settled in the Lancers, and I'm free to rest myself for a quarter of

an hour. You don't know what agonies I've been suffering the whole evening.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Good gracious me! Why?

LADY KELSEY.

I'm so afraid Alec Mackenzie will come.

BOULGER.

You needn't worry about that, Aunt Alice. He'll never venture to show his face.

LADY KELSEY.

I didn't know what to do. It was impossible to put the dance off. It's too dreadful that these horrible revelations should . . .

CARBERY.

[*Supplying the word.*] Transpire.

LADY KELSEY.

Yes, transpire on the very day I've at last persuaded Lucy to come into the world again. I wish Dick would come.

BOULGER.

Yes, he'll be able to tell us something.

MRS. CROWLEY.

But will he?

CARBERY.

Wherever I go people are talking about Mr. Mackenzie, and I'm bound to say I've found nobody who has a good word for him.

BOULGER.

[*Bitterly.*] Humpty-dumpty's had a great fall.

CARBERY.

I wonder if I might have a cigarette?

MRS. CROWLEY.

I'm sure you might. And if you press me dreadfully, I'll have one, too.

BOULGER.

Don't press her. She's already had far too many.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Well, I'll forego the pressing, but not the cigarette.

CARBERY.

[*Handing her the box and giving her a light.*] It's against all my principles, you know.

MRS. CROWLEY.

What is the use of principles except to give one an agreeable sensation of wickedness when one doesn't act up to them?

[*DICK comes in as she speaks.*

DICK.

My dear lady, you're as epigrammatic as a

dramatist. Do you say such things from choice or necessity?

LADY KELSEY.

Dick!

BOULGER.

Dick!

MRS. CROWLEY.

Mr. Lomas!

CARBERY.

Ah!

[*The four exclamations are simultaneous.*]

DICK.

This enthusiasm at my appearance is no less gratifying than unexpected.

LADY KELSEY.

I'm so glad you've come at last. Now we shall get at the truth.

BOULGER.

[*Impatiently.*] Well?

DICK.

My dear people, what *are* you talking about?

BOULGER.

Oh, don't be such an ass!

MRS. CROWLEY.

Good heavens, didn't you read the *Times* this morning?

DICK.

I only came back from Paris to-night. Besides, I never read the papers except in August.

MRS. CROWLEY.

[*Raising her eyebrows.*] When there's nothing in them?

DICK.

Pardon me, I'm an eager student of the sea-serpent and the giant gooseberry.

LADY KELSEY.

My dear Dick, it's too shocking. I wish I'd had the courage to write and ask Mr. Maekenzie not to come. But since you both came back from Africa a month ago he's been here nearly every day. And he's been so good and kind to us, I couldn't treat him as though there was no doubt the story was true.

BOULGER.

There can't be the least doubt about it. By George, I should like to kick him.

DICK.

[*Dryly.*] My dear chap, Alec is a hardy Scot and bigger than you, so I shouldn't advise you to try.

BOULGER.

I was engaged to dine with him to-night, but I wired to say I had a headache.

THE EXPLORER

LADY KELSEY.

What will he think if he sees you here?

BOULGER.

He can think what he jolly well likes.

LADY KELSEY.

I hope he has the sense to stay away.

CARBERY.

I think you're pretty safe now, Lady Kelsey. It's growing late.

DICK.

Will some one kindly explain?

MRS. CROWLEY.

D'you mean to say you really don't know—seriously? After all, you were with him.

LADY KELSEY.

My dear Dick, there are two columns of fiery denunciation in this morning's *Times*.

[DICK *is a little startled, but at once collects himself.*]

DICK.

Oh, that's only the reaction. That's nothing. Since he arrived in Mombassa, after three years in the heart of Africa, he's made almost a triumphal progress. Of course, it couldn't last. The reaction was bound to come.

BOULGER.

[*Looking at him steadily.*] The article is signed by a man named Macinnery.

DICK.

[*Calmly.*] Alec found Macinnery half starving at Mombassa, and took him solely out of charity. But he was a worthless rascal, and he had to send him back.

BOULGER.

He gives ample proof for every word he says.

DICK.

Whenever an explorer comes home, there's some one to tell nasty stories about him. People forget that kid gloves are not much use in a tropical forest, and grow very indignant when they hear that a man has used a little brute force to make himself respected.

LADY KELSEY.

Oh, my dear Dick, it's much worse than that. First poor Lucy's father died . . .

DICK.

You're not going to count that as an overwhelming misfortune? We were unanimous in describing that gentleman's demise as an uncommonly happy release.

LADY KELSEY.

But Lucy was heart-broken all the same. And when her life seemed to grow a little more cheerful, came her brother's tragic death.

DICK.

[*Abruptly, to MRS. CROWLEY.*] What is it exactly?

MRS. CROWLEY.

The long and short of it is that Mr. Mackenzie was the cause of George Allerton's death.

DICK.

Lucy's brother was killed by the slave-traders.

BOULGER.

Mackenzie sent him into a confounded trap to save his own dirty skin.

LADY KELSEY.

And the worst of it is that I think Lucy is in love with Mr. Mackenzie.

[*BOULGER makes a slight movement, and for a moment there is an uncomfortable pause.*]

CARBERY.

I saw him this evening in Piccadilly, and I almost ran into his arms. It was quite awkward.

DICK.

[*Frigidly.*] Why?

CARBERY.

I don't think I want to shake the man's hand. He's nothing short of a murderer.

BOULGER.

[*Savagely.*] He's worse than that. He's ten times worse.

LADY KELSEY.

Well, for heaven's sake be polite to him if he comes to-night.

CARBERY.

I really couldn't bring myself to shake hands with him.

DICK.

[*Dryly.*] Don't you think you'd better wait for evidence before you condemn him?

BOULGER.

My dear fellow, the letter in the *Times* is absolutely damning. Interviewers went to him from the evening papers, and he refused to see them.

DICK.

What does Lucy say of it? After all, she's the person most concerned.

LADY KELSEY.

She doesn't know. I took care that she shouldn't see the paper. I wanted to give her this evening's enjoyment unalloyed.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Take care, here she is.

[*Lucy comes in.*]

LADY KELSEY.

[*Smiling and reaching out her hand.*] Well, darling?

LUCY.

[*Going to* LADY KELSEY.] Are you growing very tired, my aunt ?

LADY KELSEY.

I can rest myself for the time. I don't think any one else will come now.

LUCY.

[*Gaily.*] You faithless woman, have you forgotten the guest of the evening ?

LADY KELSEY.

Mr. Mackenzie ?

LUCY.

[*Bending over her.*] My dear, it was charming of you to hide the paper from me this morning . . .

LADY KELSEY.

[*Startled.*] Did you see the letter ? I so wanted you not to till to-morrow.

LUCY.

Mr. Mackenzie very rightly thought I should know at once what was said about him and my brother. He sent me the paper himself this evening.

BOULGER.

Did he write to you ?

LUCY.

No, he merely scribbled on a card : "I think you should read this."

BOULGER.

Well, I'm damned!

LADY KELSEY.

What did you think of the letter, Lucy?

LUCY.

[*Proudly.*] I didn't believe it.

BOULGER.

[*Bitterly.*] You must be blinded by your—friendship for Alec Mackenzie. I never read anything more convincing.

LUCY.

I could hardly believe him guilty of such an odious crime if he confessed it with his own lips.

BOULGER.

Of course, he won't do that.

DICK.

Did I ever tell you how I made acquaintance with Alec? In the Atlantic—about three hundred miles from land.

Mrs. CROWLEY.

What a perfectly ridiculous place for an introduction.

DICK.

I was a silly young fool in those days, and I

habitually played the giddy goat. In the course of which, I fell overboard and was proceeding to drown when Alec jumped in after me. It was an incautious thing to do, because he very nearly got drowned himself.

LUCY.

That's not the only heroic thing he's done.

DICK.

No, it's one of his hobbies to risk his life to save unnecessary and useless people. But the funny thing is that ever since he saved mine, he's been quite absurdly grateful. He seems to think I did him an intentional service and fell into the water on purpose to give him a chance of pulling me out.

LUCY.

[*With a long look at DICK.*] It's very kind and good of you to have told that story.

[*The BUTLER comes in and announces ALEC MACKENZIE.*]

BUTLER.

Mr. Mackenzie.

ALEC.

[*Blandly.*] Ah, I thought I should find you here, Lady Kelsey.

LADY KELSEY.

[*Shaking hands with him.*] How d'you do? We've just been talking of you.

ALEC.

Really?

LADY KELSEY.

It's so late, we were afraid you wouldn't come. I should have been dreadfully disappointed.

ALEC.

It's very kind of you to say so. I've been at the Travellers', reading various appreciations of my own character.

LADY KELSEY.

[*Somewhat embarrassed.*] Oh, I heard there was something about you in the papers.

ALEC.

There's a good deal. I really had no idea the world was so interested in me.

LADY KELSEY.

It's charming of you to come to-night. I'm sure you hate dances!

ALEC.

Oh, no, they interest me enormously. I remember, one of the Kings of Uganda gave a dance in my honour. Ten thousand warriors in war-paint. I assure you it was most impressive.

DICK.

My dear fellow, if paint is the attraction you really need not go much farther than Mayfair.

THE EXPLORER

ALEC.

[*Pretending for the first time to notice BOULGER.*] Ah, there's my little friend Bobbie. I thought you had a headache?

LADY KELSEY.

[*Quickly.*] I'm afraid Bobby is dreadfully dissipated. He's not looking at all well.

ALEC.

[*Good-humouredly.*] You shouldn't keep such late hours, Bobbie. At your age one wants one's beauty sleep.

BOULGER.

It's very kind of you to take an interest in me. My headache has passed off.

ALEC.

I'm very glad. What do you use—Phenacetin?

BOULGER.

It went away of its own accord—after dinner.

ALEC.

[*Smiling.*] So you resolved to give the girls a treat by coming to Lady Kelsey's dance? How nice of you not to disappoint them! [*He turns to LUCY and holds out his hand. They look into one another's eyes. She takes his hand.*] I sent you a paper this evening.

LUCY.

It was very good of you.

[CARBERY comes forward and offers his arm.]

CARBERY.

I think this is my dance, Miss Allerton. May I take you in?

ALEC.

Carbery? I saw you in Piccadilly just now! You were darting about just like a young gazelle. I had no idea you could be so active.

CARBERY.

I didn't see you.

ALEC.

I observed that you were deeply interested in the shop windows as I passed. How are you?

[He holds out his hand, and for a moment CARBERY hesitates to take it. But ALEC's steady gaze compels him.]

CARBERY.

How d'you do?

ALEC.

[With an amused smile.] So glad to see you again, old man.

[DICK gives an audible chuckle, and CARBERY, reddening, draws his hand away angrily. He goes to LUCY and offers his arm.]

BOULGER.

[To MRS. CROWLEY.] Shall I take you back?

MRS. CROWLEY.

Do!

LADY KELSEY.

Won't you come, Mr. Mackenzie?

ALEC.

If you don't mind I'll stay and smoke just one cigarette with Dick Lomas. You know I'm not a dancing man.

LADY KELSEY.!

Very well.

[*All go out except ALEC and DICK.*]

DICK.

I suppose you know we were all beseeching Providence you'd have the grace to stay away to-night?

ALEC.

[*With a smile.*] I suspected it, I confess. I shouldn't have come only I wanted to see Lucy. I've been in the country all day, and I knew nothing about Macinnery's letter till I saw the placards at the station.

DICK.

Macinnery proposes to make things rather uncomfortable, I imagine.

ALEC.

[*With a smile.*] I made a mistake, didn't I? I ought to have dropped him in the river when I had no further use for him.

DICK.

What are you going to do?

ALEC.

It's not easy to clear myself at a dead man's expense. The earth covers his crime and his sins and his weakness.

DICK.

D'you mean to say that you are going to sit still and let them throw mud at you?

ALEC.

When George was dead I wrote to Lucy that he died like a brave man. I can't now publish to the whole world that he was a coward and a rogue. I can't rake up again the story of her father's crime.

DICK.

[*Impatiently.*] Surely, that's absolutely quixotic.

ALEC.

No, it isn't. I tell you I can't do anything else. I'm bound hand and foot. Lucy has talked to me of George's death, and the only thing that has consoled her is the idea that in a manner he had redeemed his father's good name. How can I rob her of that? She placed all her hopes in George. How could she face the world with the knowledge that her brother was rotten to the core, as rotten as her father.

DICK.

It seems awfully hard.

ALEC.

Besides, when all is said and done, the boy did die

game. Don't you think that should count for something? No, I tell you I can't give him away now. I should never cease to reproach myself. I love Lucy far too much to cause her such bitter pain.

DICK.

And if it loses you her love?

ALEC.

I think she can do without love better than without self-respect.

[LUCY comes in with MRS. CROWLEY.

LUCY.

I've sent my partner away. I felt I must have a few words alone with you.

DICK.

Shall I take Mrs. Crowley into a retired corner?

LUCY.

No, we have nothing to say that you can't hear. You and Nellie know that we're engaged to be married. [To ALEC.] I want you to dance with me.

ALEC.

It's very good of you.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Don't you think that's rather foolish, Lucy?

LUCY.

[To ALEC.] I want to show them all that I don't believe that you're guilty of an odious crime.

ALEC.

They've said horrible things about me?

LUCY.

Not to me. They wanted to hide it from me, but I knew they were talking.

ALEC.

You'll grow used to hearing shameful things said of me. I suppose I shall grow used to it, too.

LUCY.

Oh, I hate them.

ALEC.

Ah, it's not that I mind. What torments me is that it was so easy to despise their praise, and now I can't despise their blame.

MRS. CROWLEY.

[*Smiling.*] I believe you have some glimmerings of human nature in you after all.

LUCY.

When you came to-night, so calm and self-possessed, I admired you as I'd never admired you before.

ALEC.

It's easy enough to command one's face. I learnt to do that in Africa when often my life depended on my seeming to have no fear. But in my heart . . . I never knew that I could feel so bitter. And yet, after all, it's only your good opinion that I care for.

LUCY.

I've trusted you implicitly from the first day I saw you.

ALEC.

Thank God for that! To-day is the first time I've wanted to be assured that I was trusted. And yet I'm ashamed to want it.

LUCY.

Ah, don't be too hard upon yourself. You're so afraid of letting your tenderness appear.

ALEC.

The only way to be strong is never to surrender to one's weakness. Strength is merely a habit like everything else. I want you to be strong, too. I want you never to doubt me whatever you may hear said.

LUCY.

I gave my brother into your hands, and told you that if he died a brave man's death I could ask for no more.

ALEC.

I should tell you that I've made up my mind to make no answer to the charges that are made against me.

[There is a very short pause, while he looks at her steadily.]

MRS. CROWLEY.

But why?

ALEC.

[To LUCY.] I can give you my word of honour that I've done nothing which I regret. I know that what I did was right with regard to George, and if it were all to come again I would do exactly as I did before.

LUCY.

I think I can trust you.

ALEC.

I thought of you always, and everything I did was for your sake. Every single act of mine during these four years in Africa has been done because I loved you.

LUCY.

You must love me always, Alec, for now I have only you. [*He bends down and kisses her hand.*] Come!

[*He gives her his arm and they walk out.*]

MRS. CROWLEY.

I feel as if I should rather like to cry.

DICK.

Do you really? So do I.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Don't be so silly.

DICK.

By the way, you don't want to dance with me, do you?

MRS. CROWLEY.

Certainly not. You dance abominably.

DICK.

It's charming of you to say so. It puts me at my ease at once.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Come and sit on the sofa and talk seriously.

DICK.

Ah, you want to flirt with me, Mrs. Crowley.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Good heavens, what on earth makes you think that?

DICK.

It's what a woman always means when she asks you to talk sensibly.

MRS. CROWLEY.

I can't bear a man who thinks women are in love with him.

DICK.

Bless you, I don't think that. I only think they want to marry me.

MRS. CROWLEY.

That's equally detestable.

DICK.

Not at all. However old, ugly, and generally

undesirable a man is, he'll find a heap of charming girls who are willing to marry him. Marriage is still the only decent means of livelihood for a really nice girl.

MRS. CROWLEY.

But, my dear friend, if a woman really makes up her mind to marry a man, nothing on earth can save him.

DICK.

Don't say that, you terrify me.

MRS. CROWLEY.

You need not be in the least alarmed, because I shall refuse you.

DICK.

Thanks, awfully. But all the same I don't think I'll risk a proposal.

MRS. CROWLEY.

My dear Mr. Lomas, your only safety is in immediate flight.

DICK.

Why?

MRS. CROWLEY.

It must be obvious to the meanest intelligence that you've been on the verge of proposing to me for the last month.

DICK.

Oh, I assure you, you're quite mistaken.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Then I shan't come to the play with you to-morrow?

DICK.

But I've taken the seats, and I've ordered an exquisite dinner at the Carlton.

MRS. CROWLEY.

What have you ordered?

DICK.

Potage Bisque . . . [*She makes a little face.*]
Sole Normande . . . [*She shrugs her shoulders.*]
Wild Duck.

MRS. CROWLEY.

With an orange salad?

DICK.

Yes.

MRS. CROWLEY.

I don't positively dislike that.

DICK.

And I've ordered a soufflé with an ice in the middle of it.

MRS. CROWLEY.

I shan't come.

DICK.

I shouldn't have thought you kept very well abreast

of dramatic art if you insist on marrying every man who takes you to a theatre.

MRS. CROWLEY.

[*Demurely.*] I was very nicely brought up.

DICK.

Of course, if you're going to make yourself systematically disagreeable unless I marry you, I suppose I shall have to do it in self-defence.

MRS. CROWLEY.

I don't know if you have the least idea what you're talking about. I'm sure I haven't!

DICK.

I was merely asking you in a rather well-turned phrase to name the day. The lamb shall be ready for the slaughter!

MRS. CROWLEY.

Couldn't you infuse a little romance into it? You might begin by going down on your bended knees.

DICK.

I assure you that's quite out of fashion. Lovers, nowadays, are much too middle-aged, and their joints are creaky. Besides, it ruins the trousers.

MRS. CROWLEY.

At all events, there can be no excuse for your not saying that you know you're utterly unworthy of me.

DICK.

Wild horses wouldn't induce me to make a statement which is so remote from the truth.

MRS. CROWLEY.

And, of course, you must threaten to commit suicide if I don't consent.

DICK.

Women are such sticklers for routine. They have no originality.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Very well, have it your own way. But I must have a proposal in due form.

DICK.

Only four words are needed. [*Counting them on his fingers.*] Will you marry me?

MRS. CROWLEY.

That is both clear and simple. I reply in one: No!

DICK.

[*As though he were not sure that he had heard correctly.*] I beg your pardon?

MRS. CROWLEY.

The answer is in the negative.

DICK.

You're joking. You're certainly joking.

MRS. CROWLEY.

I will be a sister to you.

DICK.

Do you mean to say you deliberately refuse me?

MRS. CROWLEY.

[*Smiling.*] I promised you I would.

DICK.

[*With much seriousness.*] I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

MRS. CROWLEY.

[*Puzzled.*] The man's mad. The man's nothing short of a raving lunatic.

DICK.

I wanted to see if you were really attached to me. You have given me a proof of esteem which I promise you I will never forget.

MRS. CROWLEY.

[*Laughing.*] You're a perfect idiot, Mr. Lomas!

DICK.

It's one of my cherished convictions that a really nice woman is never so cruel as to marry a man she cares for.

MRS. CROWLEY.

You're much too flippant to marry anybody, and you're perfectly odious into the bargain.

[*She goes out. DICK, chuckling, lights a cigarette. ALEC comes in and lies down lazily on the sofa.*

ALEC.

Why, Dick, what's the matter? You look as pleased as Punch.

DICK.

My dear fellow, I feel like the Terrible Turk. I've been wrestling, and I thought I was going to have a fall. But by the display of considerable agility I've managed to keep my legs.

ALEC.

What *do* you mean?

DICK.

Nothing. It's merely the gaiety of forty-two.

[*BOULGER comes into the room, followed immediately by MALLINS and CARBERY. He starts slightly when he sees ALEC, but then goes over to the table on which is the whiskey.*

MALLINS.

May we smoke here, Bobby?

BOULGER.

Certainly. Dick insisted that this room should be particularly reserved for that purpose.

[*The BUTLER comes in with a small silver salver, and takes up one or two dirty glasses.*

DICK.

Lady Kelsey is the most admirable of all hostesses.

ALEC.

[*Taking a cigarette from his case.*] Give me a match, Bobby, there's a good boy. [BOULGER, *with his back turned to ALEC, takes no notice. He pours himself out some whiskey. ALEC smiles slightly.*] Bobby, throw me over the matches!

BOULGER.

[*With his back still turned.*] Miller!

BUTLER.

Yes, sir?

BOULGER.

Mr. Mackenzie is asking for something.

BUTLER.

Yes, sir!

ALEC.

You might give me a light, will you?

BUTLER.

Yes, sir!

[*The BUTLER takes the matches to ALEC, who lights his cigarette.*

ALEC.

Thank you. [*Complete silence is preserved till the BUTLER leaves the room.*] I perceive, Bobbie, that

during my absence you have not added good manners to your other accomplishments.

BOULGER.

If you want things, you can ask the servants for them.

ALEC.

[*Good-humouredly.*] Don't be foolish, Bobbie!

BOULGER.

Would you be so kind as to remember that my name is Boulger?

ALEC.

[*Smiling.*] Perhaps you would like me to call you Sir Robert?

BOULGER.

I should prefer that you would call me nothing at all. I have absolutely no wish to know you.

ALEC.

Which shows that your taste is as bad as your breeding.

BOULGER.

[*Angrily, walking up to him.*] By God, I'll knock you down!

ALEC.

You could hardly do that when I'm already lying on my back.

BOULGER.

Look here, Mackenzie, I'm not going to let you play the fool with me. I want to know what answer

you have to make to all these charges that have been brought against you.

ALEC.

Might I suggest that only Miss Allerton has the least right to receive answers to her questions? And she hasn't questioned me.

BOULGER.

I've given up trying to understand her attitude. If I were she, it would make me sick with horror to look at you. Since this morning you've rested under a direct accusation of causing George's death, and you've said nothing in self-defence.

ALEC.

Nothing.

BOULGER.

You've been given an opportunity to explain yourself, and you haven't taken it.

ALEC.

Quite true.

BOULGER.

Are you not going to deny the charge?

ALEC.

I'm not.

BOULGER.

Then I can only draw one conclusion. There appears to be no means of bringing you to justice, but at least I can refuse to know you.

ALEC.

All is over between us. And shall I return your letters and your photograph?

BOULGER.

I'm not joking.

ALEC.

It's singular that though I'm Scotch and you are English I should be able to see how ridiculous you are, while you're quite blind to your own absurdity.

DICK.

Come, Alec! Remember he's only a boy.

BOULGER.

[*To* DICK LOMAS.] I'm perfectly able to look after myself, and I'll thank you not to interfere. [*To* ALEC.] If Lucy's so indifferent to her brother's death that she's willing to keep up with you, that's her own affair . . .

DICK.

[*Interrupting.*] Come, Bobbie, don't make a scene.

BOULGER.

[*Furiously.*] Leave me alone, confound you!

ALEC.

Do you think this is quite the place for an altercation? Wouldn't you gain more notoriety if you attacked me in my club or at Church parade on Sunday?

BOULGER.

It's mere shameless impudence that you should come here to-night. You're using these wretched women as a shield, because you know that as long as Lucy sticks to you there are people who won't believe the story.

ALEC.

I came for the same reason as yourself, dear boy. Because I was invited.

DICK.

Now then, Bobbie, shut up!

BOULGER.

I shan't shut up. The man's got no right to force himself here.

DICK.

Remember that you're Lady Kelsey's nephew.

BOULGER.

I didn't ask him. D'you think I'd have come if I knew he was going to be here? He's acknowledged that he has no defence.

ALEC.

Pardon me, I acknowledge nothing and deny nothing.

BOULGER.

That won't do for me. I want the truth, and I'm going to get it. I've got a right to know.

ALEC.

[*Beginning to lose his temper.*] Don't make an ass of yourself, Bobby.

BOULGER.

By God, I'll make you answer!

[*As he says this he goes up to ALEC furiously, but ALEC, with a twist of his arm, hurls him back.*]

ALEC.

I could break your back, you silly boy.

[*With a cry of anger BOULGER is about to spring at ALEC when DICK gets in the way.*]

DICK.

Now then, no scenes. And you'll only get the worst of it, Bobby. Alec could just crumple you up. Take him away, Mallins. Don't stand there like a stuffed owl, Carbery.

BOULGER.

Let me alone, you fool!

MALLINS.

Come along, old chap.

BOULGER.

[*To ALEC.*] You damned skunk!

DICK.

Now then, be off with you. Don't make a silly ass of yourself.

[*BOULGER, MALLINS and CARBERY go out.*]

DICK.

Poor Lady Kelsey! To-morrow half London will

be saying that you and Bobby had a stand-up fight in her drawing-room.

ALEC.

[*Furiously.*] The damned cubs!

DICK.

The position is growing confoundedly awkward!

ALEC.

They lick my boots till I loathe them, and then they turn against me like a pack of curs. Oh, I despise them—these silly boys who stay at home wallowing in their ease while men work. Thank God, I've done with them all now. They think one can fight one's way through Africa as easily as one walks down Piccadilly. They think one goes through hardships and dangers, illness and starvation, to be the lion of a dinner-party in Mayfair.

DICK.

My dear Alec, keep calm.

ALEC.

[*With a visible effort containing himself completely, with studied nonchalance.*] D'you think that I look wildly excited?

DICK.

[*Ironically.*] I don't think butter would melt in your mouth.

[DICK and ALEC go out into the garden. In a moment BOULGER comes in with LADY KELSEY.]

BOULGER.

Thank heaven, there's nobody here.

LADY KELSEY.

I think you're dreadfully foolish, Bobby. You know how Lucy resents any interference with her actions.

BOULGER.

Won't you sit down? You must be dreadfully tired.

LADY KELSEY.

Why won't you wait till to-morrow?

BOULGER.

I feel that it ought to be settled at once.

[LUCY appears.]

LUCY.

Did you send for me, my aunt? Mr. Carbery said you wanted to speak to me here.

LADY KELSEY.

Yes, I gave him that message.

BOULGER.

I asked Aunt Alice to beg you to come here. I was afraid you wouldn't if I asked you.

LUCY.

[*Lightly.*] What nonsense! I'm always delighted to see you.

BOULGER.

I wanted to speak to you about something, and I thought Aunt Alice should be present.

LUCY.

Is it so important that it can't wait till to-morrow?

BOULGER.

I venture to think it's very important.

LUCY.

[*Smiling.*] I'm all attention.

[*He hesitates for a moment, then braces himself to the ordeal.*]

BOULGER.

I've told you often, Lucy, that I've been in love with you for as many years as I can remember.

LUCY.

Surely you've not snatched me from the unwilling arm of my partner in order to make me a proposal of marriage?

BOULGER.

I'm perfectly serious, Lucy.

LUCY.

[*Smiling.*] I assure you it doesn't suit you at all.

BOULGER.

The other day I asked you again to marry me, just before Alec Mackenzie came back.

LUCY.

It was very charming of you. You mustn't think that because I laugh at you a little I'm not grateful for your affection.

BOULGER.

Except for that letter in this morning's *Times*, I should never have dared to say anything to you again. But that changes everything.

LUCY.

I don't understand what you mean.

BOULGER.

[*After a little pause.*] I ask you again if you'll be my wife? When Alec Mackenzie came back I understood why you were so indifferent to me, but you can't marry him now.

LUCY.

You have no right to talk to me like this.

BOULGER.

I'm the only man who's related to you at all, and I love you with my whole soul.

LADY KELSEY.

I think you should listen to him, Lucy. I'm growing old, and soon you'll be quite alone in the world.

BOULGER.

I don't ask you to care for me. I only want to serve you.

LUCY.

I can only repeat that I'm very grateful to you. I can never marry you.

BOULGER.

[*Beginning to lose his temper again.*] Are you going to continue to know Mackenzie? If you'll take the advice of any unprejudiced person about that letter, you'll find that he'll say the same as I. There can be no shadow of doubt that Mackenzie is guilty of a monstrous crime.

LUCY.

I don't care what the evidence is. I know he can't have done a shameful thing.

BOULGER.

But have you forgotten that it's your own brother he killed? The whole country is up in arms against him, and you are quite indifferent.

LUCY.

[*Much moved.*] Oh, Bobbie, how can you be so cruel?

BOULGER.

If you ever really cared for George at all, you must wish to punish the man who caused his death.

LUCY.

Oh, why d'you torment me? I tell you that he isn't guilty. It's because I'm convinced of that . . .

BOULGER.

[*Interrupting.*] But have you asked him?

LUCY.

No.

BOULGER.

He might give you the truth.

LUCY.

I couldn't do that.

BOULGER.

Why not?

LADY KELSEY.

It's very strange that he should insist on this silence.

LUCY.

Do you believe that story too?

LADY KELSEY.

I don't know what to believe. It's so extraordinary. If the man's innocent, why doesn't he speak?

LUCY.

He knows I trust him. I couldn't cause him the great pain of asking him questions.

BOULGER.

Are you afraid he couldn't answer them?

LUCY.

No, no, no!

BOULGER.

Well, just try. After all, you owe as much as that to the memory of George.

LADY KELSEY.

I think it's very unreasonable, Lucy. He knows we're his friends. He can count on our discretion.

LUCY.

I believe in him implicitly. I believe in him with all the strength I've got.

BOULGER.

Then, surely it can make no difference if you ask him. There can be no reason for him not to trust you.

LUCY.

Oh, why don't you leave me alone?

BOULGER.

Ask him point blank. If he refuses to answer you . . .

LUCY.

[*Hastily.*] It would mean nothing. Why should he answer? I believe in him absolutely. I think he's the greatest and most honourable man I've ever

known. I care more for his little finger than for the whole world. I love him with all my heart. And that's why he can't be guilty of this horrible crime. Because I've loved him for years, and he's known it. And he loves me. And he's loved me always.

[ALEC and DICK stroll in from the garden.

LUCY.

Alec, Alec, I want you! Thank God, you've come!

ALEC.

[Going to her quickly.] What is it?

LUCY.

Alec, you must tell them now about you and me.

[ALEC looks at LUCY for a moment, and then turns to LADY KELSEY.

ALEC.

I think perhaps we ought to have told you before, Lady Kelsey. But we wanted to enjoy our little secret by ourselves.

LADY KELSEY.

I'm afraid to understand.

ALEC.

I have asked Lucy to be my wife, and she . . .

LUCY.

[Interrupting him.] She said she would be honoured and deeply grateful.

LADY KELSEY.

[*Greatly embarrassed.*] I hardly know what to say . . . How long have you been engaged?

LUCY.

Won't you tell me you're pleased, my aunt? I know you want me to be happy.

LADY KELSEY.

Of course, I want you to be happy. But I—I . . .
[*BOULGER turns on his heel and walks out.*]

DICK.

[*Offering his arm to LADY KELSEY.*] Wouldn't you like to go back to the drawing-room?

[*She allows herself to be led away, helplessly.*
ALEC and LUCY are left alone.]

ALEC.

[*With a smile.*] I don't think our announcement has been received with enthusiasm.

LUCY.

You're not angry with me, ALEC?

ALEC.

Of course not. Everything you do is right and charming.

LUCY.

I shall really think I'm a wonderful person if I've taught you to pay compliments.

ALEC.

I'm so glad to be alone with you. Now, at all events, people will have the sense to leave us by ourselves.

LUCY.

[*Passionately.*] I want your love. I want your love so badly.

ALEC.

[*Taking her in his arms.*] My darling!

LUCY.

[*Clinging to him.*] The moment I'm with you I feel so confident and happy.

ALEC.

Only when you're with me? [*LUCY looks at him for an instant. He repeats the question in a caressing voice.*] Only when you're with me, darling?

LUCY.

Why d'you think I made you tell them we were engaged?

ALEC.

You took me by surprise.

LUCY.

I had to tell them. I couldn't keep it back. They made me suffer so dreadfully.

ALEC.

The brutes! Tell me what they did.

LUCY.

Oh, they said horrible things about you.

ALEC.

No more than that?

LUCY.

It's nothing to you. But to me . . . Oh, you don't know what agony I endure. I'm such a coward! I thought I was so much braver.

ALEC.

I don't understand you.

LUCY.

I wanted to burn my ships behind me. I wanted to reassure myself. [ALEC makes a slight movement away from her, but she holds him back anxiously.] Forgive me, dear. You don't know how terrible it is. I stand so dreadfully alone. Every one is convinced that you caused poor George's death—every one but me. [ALEC looks at her gravely, without speaking.] I try to put the thoughts out of my head, but I can't—I can't. That letter in the *Times* looks so dreadfully true. Don't you see what I mean? The uncertainty is more than I can bear. At the first moment I felt so absolutely sure of you.

ALEC.

And now you don't?

LUCY.

I trust you just as much as ever. I know it's

impossible that you should have done a shameful thing. But there it stands in black and white, and you have nothing to say in answer.

ALEC.

I know it's very difficult. That is why I asked you to believe in me.

LUCY.

I do, Alec—with all my soul. But have mercy on me. I'm not so strong as I thought. It's easy for you to stand alone. You're iron, but I'm a weak woman.

ALEC.

Oh, no, you're not like other women. I was proud of your unconquerable spirit.

LUCY.

It was easy to be brave where my father was concerned, and George, but you're the man I love, and it's so different. I don't know any more how to stand alone.

[ALEC looks at her, thinking, but does not reply for a moment.]

ALEC.

Do you remember that only an hour ago I told you that I'd done nothing which I wouldn't do again? I gave you my word of honour that I could reproach myself for nothing.

LUCY.

Oh, I know. I'm so utterly ashamed of myself. But I can't bear the doubt.

ALEC.

Doubt! You've said the word at last.

LUCY.

I tell every one that I don't believe a word of these horrible charges, and I repeat to myself: I'm certain, I'm certain that he's innocent. And yet at the bottom of my heart there's a doubt, and I can't crush it.

ALEC.

Is that why you told them we were engaged to be married?

LUCY.

I wanted to kill that gnawing pain of suspicion. I thought if I stood up before them and cried out that my trust in you was so great, I was willing to marry you notwithstanding everything, I should at least have peace in my own heart.

[ALEC *walks up and down. Then he stops in front of LUCY.*

ALEC.

What is it precisely you want me to do?

LUCY.

I want you to have mercy on me because I love you. Don't tell the world if you choose not to, but tell me the truth. I know you're incapable of lying. If I only have it from your own lips I shall believe. I want to be certain, certain!

ALEC.

Don't you realise that I would never have asked you to marry me if my conscience hadn't been quite clear? Don't you realise that the reasons I have for holding my tongue must be of overwhelming strength?

LUCY.

But I am going to be your wife, and I love you, and you love me.

ALEC.

I implore you not to insist, Lucy. Let us remember only that the past is gone and we love one another. It's impossible for me to tell you anything.

LUCY.

Oh, but you must now. If any part of the story is true, you must give me a chance of judging for myself.

ALEC.

I'm very sorry, I can't.

LUCY.

But you'll kill my love for you. The doubt which lurked at the bottom of my soul now fills me. How can you let me suffer such maddening torture?

ALEC.

I thought you trusted me.

LUCY.

I'll be satisfied if you'll only tell me one thing: only tell me that when you sent George on that

expedition you didn't know that he'd be killed. [ALEC looks at her steadily.] Only say that, Alec. Say that's not true, and I'll believe you.

ALEC.

[*Very quietly.*] But it is true.

[LUCY does not answer, but stares at him with terrified eyes.]

LUCY.

Oh, I don't understand. Oh, my dearest, don't treat me as a child. Have mercy on me! You must be serious now. It's a matter of life and death to both of us.

ALEC.

I'm perfectly serious.

LUCY.

You knew that you were sending George into a death-trap? You knew he couldn't escape alive?

ALEC.

Except by a miracle.

LUCY.

And you don't believe in miracles?

ALEC.

No.

LUCY.

Oh, it can't be true. Oh, Alec, Alec, Alec! Oh, what shall I do?

ALEC.

I tell you that whatever I did was inevitable.

LUCY.

Then if that's true, the rest must be true also. Oh, it's awful. I can't realise it. Haven't you anything to say at all?

ALEC.

[*In a low voice.*] Only that I've loved you always with all my soul.

LUCY.

You knew how much I loved my brother. You knew how much it meant to me that he should live to wipe out my father's dishonour. All the future was centred on him, and you sacrificed him.

ALEC.

[*Hesitatingly.*] I think I might tell you this. He had committed a grave error of judgment. We were entrapped by the Arabs, and our only chance of escape entailed the almost certain death of one of us.

[*An inkling of the truth seizes LUCY, and her face is suddenly distorted with horror. She goes up to him impulsively. Her voice trembles with emotion.*

LUCY.

Alec, Alec, he didn't do something—unworthy? You're not trying to shield him?

ALEC.

[*Hoarsely.*] No, no, no!

LUCY.

[*With a gasp of relief, almost to herself.*] Thank God! I couldn't have borne that. [*To ALEC, hopelessly.*] Then I don't understand.

ALEC.

It was not unjust that he should suffer for the catastrophe which he had brought about.

LUCY.

At those times one doesn't think of justice. He was so young, so frank. Wouldn't it have been nobler to give your life for his?

ALEC.

Oh, my dear, you don't know how easy it is to give one's life. How little you know me! Do you think I should have hesitated if my death had been sufficient to solve the difficulty? I had my work to do. I was bound by solemn treaties to the surrounding tribes. It would have been cowardly for me to die. I tell you, my death would have meant the awful death of every man in my party.

LUCY.

I can only see one thing, that you took George, George of all others.

ALEC.

I knew at the time that what I did might cost me your love, and though you won't believe this, I did it for your sake.

[*At this moment MRS. CROWLEY enters with SIR ROBERT BOULGER. She has a cloak on.*

MRS. CROWLEY.

I was just coming to say good-night. Bobby is going to drive me home. [*She suddenly notices LUCY'S agitation.*] What on earth's the matter?

[*LADY KELSEY and DICK LOMAS come in. LADY KELSEY looks at LUCY and then goes up to her impulsively.*

LADY KELSEY.

Lucy, Lucy!

LUCY.

[*Brokenly.*] I'm no longer engaged to Mr. Mackenzie. He can't deny that what is said about him is true.

[*They look at him in astonishment, but he makes no movement.*

MRS. CROWLEY.

[*To ALEC.*] Haven't you anything to say at all? You must have some explanation to offer?

ALEC.

No, I have none whatever.

DICK.

Alec, old man, have you realised all that this means?

ALEC.

Quite. I see now that it was inevitable.

LUCY.

[*With a sudden burst of furious anger.*] You killed him! You killed him as surely as if you'd strangled him with your own hands.

[ROBERT BOULGER goes to the door and flings it open. ALEC gives LUCY a look, then slightly shrugs his shoulders. He walks out without a word. The moment he has gone LUCY sinks down and bursts into passionate tears.]

END OF THE THIRD ACT.

THE FOURTH ACT

SCENE.—*A library in the house of DICK LOMAS in Portman Square.*

DICK *and his VALET.* DICK *is putting flowers into a vase.*

DICK.

Has Mr. Mackenzie come in?

CHARLES.

Yes, sir. He's gone to his room.

DICK.

I expect Mrs. Crowley and Miss Allerton to tea. If any one else comes I'm not at home.

CHARLES.

Very well, sir.

DICK.

And if a caller should ask at what time I'm expected back, you haven't the least idea.

CHARLES.

Very well, sir.

DICK.

We shall want breakfast at eight to-morrow. I'm going down to Southampton to see Mr. Mackenzie off. But I shall be home to dinner. How about those cases in the hall?

CHARLES.

Mr. Mackenzie said they were to be sent for this afternoon. They're only labelled Zanzibar. Is that sufficient, sir?

DICK.

Oh, I suppose so. Mr. Mackenzie will have given the shippers all directions. You'd better bring the tea at once. Mrs. Crowley is coming at four.

CHARLES.

Very well, sir.

[He goes out. DICK continues to arrange the flowers, then goes to the window and looks out. He comes back. The door is opened by CHARLES, who announces MRS. CROWLEY.]

CHARLES.

Mrs. Crowley.

DICK.

[Going towards her eagerly and taking both her hands.] Best of women!

MRS. CROWLEY.

You seem quite glad to see me?

DICK.

I am. But where is Lucy?

MRS. CROWLEY.

She's coming later. . . . I don't know why you should squeeze my hands in this pointed manner.

DICK.

What an age it is since I saw you!

MRS. CROWLEY.

If you bury yourself in Scotland all the summer, you can't expect to see people who go to Homburg and the Italian lakes.

DICK.

Heavens, how you cultivate respectability!

MRS. CROWLEY.

It's a sensitive plant whose vagaries one has to humour.

DICK.

Aren't you delighted to be back in town?

MRS. CROWLEY.

London's the most charming place in the world to get away from and to come back to. Now tell me all you've been doing, if I can hear it without blushing too furiously.

DICK.

My behaviour would have done credit to a clergyman's only daughter. I dragged Alec off to Scotland after that horrible scene at Lady Kelsey's, and we played golf.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Was he very wretched, poor thing?

DICK.

He didn't say a word. I wanted to comfort him, but he never gave me a chance. He never mentioned Lucy's name.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Did he seem unhappy?

DICK.

No. He was just the same as ever, impassive and collected.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Really he's inhuman.

DICK.

He's an anomaly in this juvenile century. He's an ancient Roman who buys his clothes in Savile Row. An eagle caged with a colony of canaries.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Then he's very much in the way in England, and it's much better for him that he should go back to Africa.

DICK.

This time to-morrow he'll be half-way down the channel.

MRS. CROWLEY.

I'm really beginning to think you're a perfect angel, Mr. Lomas.

DICK.

Don't say that, it makes me feel so middle-aged. I'd much sooner be a young sinner than an elderly cherub.

MRS. CROWLEY.

It was sweet of you to look after him through the summer and then insist on his staying here till he went away. How long is he going for this time?

DICK.

Heaven knows! Perhaps for ever.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Have you told him that Lucy is coming?

DICK.

No. I thought that was a pleasing piece of information which I'd leave you to impart.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Thanks!

DICK.

She's only coming to indulge a truly feminine passion for making scenes, and she's made Alec quite wretched enough already. Why doesn't she marry Robert Boulger?

MRS. CROWLEY.

Why should she?

DICK.

Half the women I know merely married their

husbands to spite somebody else. It appears to be one of the commonest causes of matrimony.

MRS. CROWLEY.

[*With a quizzical look at him.*] Talking of which, what are you going to do when Mr. Mackenzie is gone?

DICK.

Talking of the weather and the crops, I propose to go to Spain.

MRS. CROWLEY.

[*Opening her eyes wide.*] How very extraordinary! I thought of going there, too.

DICK.

Then, without a moment's hesitation, I shall go to Norway.

MRS. CROWLEY.

It'll be dreadfully cold.

DICK.

Dreadfully. But I shall be supported by the consciousness of having done my duty.

MRS. CROWLEY.

You don't think there would be room for both of us in Spain?

DICK.

I'm convinced there wouldn't. We should always be running against one another, and you'd insist on my looking out all your trains in Bradshaw.

MRS. CROWLEY.

I hope you remember that you asked me to tea to-day?

DICK.

Pardon me, you asked yourself. I keep the letter next to my heart and put it under my pillow every night.

MRS. CROWLEY.

You fibber! Besides, if I did, it was only on Lucy's account.

DICK.

That, I venture to think, is neither polite nor accurate.

MRS. CROWLEY.

I don't think I should so utterly detest you, if you hadn't such a good opinion of yourself.

DICK.

You forget that I vowed on the head of my maternal grandmother never to speak to you again.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Oh, I'm always doing that. I tell my maid that each time she does my hair badly.

DICK.

You trifled with the tenderest affection of an innocent and unsophisticated old bachelor.

Mrs. CROWLEY.

Is that you by any chance ?

DICK.

Of course, it's me. D'you think I was talking of the man in the moon ?

Mrs. CROWLEY.

[*Looking at him critically.*] With the light behind, you might still pass for thirty-five.

DICK.

I've given up youth and its vanities. I no longer pluck out my white hairs.

Mrs. CROWLEY.

Then how on earth do you occupy your leisure ?

DICK.

For the last three months I've been laboriously piecing together the fragments of a broken heart.

Mrs. CROWLEY.

If you hadn't been so certain that I was going to accept you, I should never have refused. I couldn't resist the temptation of saying "No" just to see how you took it.

DICK.

I flatter myself that I took it very well.

Mrs. CROWLEY.

You didn't. You showed an entire lack of humour. You might have known that a nice woman doesn't

marry a man the first time he asks her. It's making oneself too cheap. It was very silly of you to go off to Scotland as if you didn't care. . . . How was I to know that you meant to wait three months before asking me again ?

DICK.

I haven't the least intention of asking you again.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Then why in heaven's name did you invite me to tea ?

DICK.

May I respectfully remind you, first, that you invited yourself . . .

MRS. CROWLEY.

[*Interrupting.*] You're so irrelevant.

DICK.

And, secondly, that an invitation to tea is not necessarily accompanied by a proposal of marriage.

MRS. CROWLEY.

I'm afraid you're lamentably ignorant of the usages of good society.

DICK.

I assure you it's not done in the best circles.

MRS. CROWLEY.

[*With a little pout.*] I shall be very cross with you in a minute.

DICK.

Why ?

MRS. CROWLEY.

Because you're not behaving at all prettily.

DICK.

D'you know what I'd do if I were you? Propose to me.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Oh, I couldn't do anything so immodest.

DICK.

I have registered a vow that I will never offer my hand and heart to any woman again.

MRS. CROWLEY.

On the head of your maternal grandmother?

DICK.

Oh no, far more serious than that. On the grave of my maiden aunt, who left me all my money.

MRS. CROWLEY.

What will you say if I do?

DICK.

That depends entirely on how you do it. I may remind you, however, that first you go down on your bended knees.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Oh, I waived that with you.

DICK.

And then you confess you're unworthy of me.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Mr. Lomas, I am a widow. I am twenty-nine and extremely eligible. My maid is a treasure. My dressmaker is charming. I am clever enough to laugh at your jokes, and not so learned as to know where they come from.

DICK.

Really you're very long-winded. I said it all in four words.

MRS. CROWLEY.

So could I if I might write it down.

DICK.

You must say it.

MRS. CROWLEY.

But what I'm trying to make you understand is that I don't want to marry you a bit. You're just the sort of man who'll beat his wife regularly every Saturday night. . . . You will say yes if I ask you, won't you?

DICK.

I've never been able to refuse a woman anything.

MRS. CROWLEY.

I have no doubt you will after six months of holy matrimony.

DICK.

I never saw any one make such a fuss about so insignificant a detail as a proposal of marriage.

MRS. CROWLEY.

DICK. [*She stretches out her hands, smiling, and he takes her in his arms.*] You really are a detestable person.

DICK.

[*With a smile, taking a ring from his pocket.*] I bought an engagement ring yesterday on the off chance of its being useful.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Then you meant to ask me all the time?

DICK.

Of course I did, you silly.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Oh, I wish I had known that before. I'd have refused you again.

DICK.

You absurd creature. [*He kisses her.*]

MRS. CROWLEY.

[*Trying to release herself.*] There's somebody coming.

DICK.

It's only Alec. [*Alec comes in.*]

ALEC.

Hulloa!

DICK.

Alec, we've made friends, Mrs. Crowley and I.

ALEC.

It certainly looks very much like it.

DICK.

The fact is, I've asked her to marry me, and she . . .

MRS. CROWLEY.

[*Interrupting, with a smile.*] After much pressure—

DICK.

Has consented.

ALEC.

I'm so glad. I heartily congratulate you both. I was rather unhappy at leaving Dick, Mrs. Crowley. But now I leave him in your hands, I'm perfectly content. He's the dearest, kindest old chap I've ever known.

DICK.

Shut up, Alec! Don't play the heavy father, or we shall burst into tears.

ALEC.

He'll be an admirable husband because he's an admirable friend.

MRS. CROWLEY.

I know he will. And I'm only prevented from saying all I think of him and how much I love him, by the fear that he'll become perfectly unmanageable.

DICK.

Spare me these chaste blushes which mantle my youthful brow. Will you pour out the tea . . . Nellie?

MRS. CROWLEY.

Yes . . . Dick.

[*She sits down at the tea-table and DICK makes himself comfortable in an arm-chair by her side.*]

ALEC.

Well, I'm thankful to say that everything's packed and ready.

MRS. CROWLEY.

I wish you'd stay for our wedding.

DICK.

Do. You can go just as well by the next boat.

ALEC.

I'm afraid that everything is settled now. I've given instructions at Zanzibar to collect bearers, and I must arrive as quickly as I can.

DICK.

I wish to goodness you'd give up these horrible explorations.

ALEC.

But they're the very breath of my life. You don't know the exhilaration of the daily dangers—the joy of treading where only the wild beasts have trodden before. Oh, already I can hardly bear my impatience when I think of the boundless country and the enchanting freedom. Here one grows so small, so despicable, but in Africa everything is built to a nobler standard. There a man is really a man; there one knows what are will and strength and courage. Oh, you don't know what it is to stand on the edge of some great plain and breathe the pure keen air

after the terrors of the forest. Then at last you know what freedom is.

DICK.

The boundless plain of Hyde Park is enough for me, and the aspect of Piccadilly on a fine day in June gives me quite as many emotions as I want.

MRS. CROWLEY.

But what will you gain by it all, now that your work in East Africa is over, by all the dangers and the hardships?

ALEC.

Nothing. I want to gain nothing. Perhaps I shall discover some new species of antelope or some unknown plant. Perhaps I shall find some new waterway. That is all the reward I want. I love the sense of power and mastery. What do you think I care for the tinsel rewards of kings and peoples?

DICK.

I always said you were melodramatic. I never heard anything so transpontine.

MRS. CROWLEY.

And the end of it, what will be the end?

ALEC.

The end is death in some fever-stricken swamp, obscurely, worn out by exposure and ague and starvation. And the bearers will seize my gun and my clothes and leave me to the jackals.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Don't. It's too horrible.

ALEC.

Why, what does it matter? I shall die standing up. I shall go the last journey as I have gone every other.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Without fear?

DICK.

For all the world like the wicked baronet: Once aboard the lugger and the girl is mine!

MRS. CROWLEY.

Don't you want men to remember you?

ALEC.

Perhaps they will. Perhaps in a hundred years or so, in some flourishing town where I discovered nothing but wilderness, they will commission a second-rate sculptor to make a fancy statue of me. And I shall stand in front of the Stock Exchange, a convenient perch for birds, to look eternally upon the various shabby deeds of human kind.

[During this speech MRS. CROWLEY makes a sign to DICK, who walks slowly away and goes out.]

MRS. CROWLEY.

And is that really everything? I can't help thinking that at the bottom of your heart is something that you've never told to a living soul.

[He gives her a long look, and then after a moment's thought breaks into a little smile.]

ALEC.

Why do you want to know so much?

MRS. CROWLEY.

Tell me.

ALEC.

I daresay I shall never see you again. Perhaps it doesn't much matter what I say to you. You'll think me very silly, but I'm afraid I'm rather—patriotic. It's only we who live away from England who really love it. I'm so proud of my country, and I wanted so much to do something for it. Often in Africa I've thought of this dear England, and longed not to die till I had done my work. Behind all the soldiers and the statesmen whose fame is imperishable, there is a long line of men who've built up the Empire piece by piece. Their names are forgotten, and only students know their history, but each one of them gave a province to his country. And I, too, have my place among them. For five years I toiled night and day, and at the end of it was able to hand over to the Commissioners a broad tract of land, rich and fertile. After my death England will forget my faults and my mistakes. I care nothing for the flouts and gibes with which she has repaid all my pain, for I have added another fair jewel to her crown. I don't want rewards. I only want the honour of serving this dear land of ours.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Why is it, when you're so nice really, that you do all you can to make people think you utterly horrid?

ALEC.

Don't laugh at me because you've found out that at heart I'm nothing more than a sentimental old woman.

MRS. CROWLEY.

[*Putting her hand on his arm.*] What would you do if Lucy came here to-day?

[*ALEC starts, looks at her sharply, then answers with deliberation.*

ALEC.

I have always lived in polite society. I should never dream of outraging its conventions. If Miss Allerton happened to come, you may be sure I should be scrupulously polite.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Is that all? Lucy has suffered very much.

ALEC.

And do you suppose I've not suffered? Because I don't whine my misery to all and sundry, d'you think I don't care? I'm not the man to fall in and out of love with every pretty face I meet. All my life I've kept an ideal before my eyes. Oh, you don't know what it meant to me to fall in love. I felt that I had lived all my life in a prison, and at last Lucy came and took me by the hand and led me out. And for the first time I breathed the free air of heaven. Oh God! how I've suffered for it! Why should it have come to me? Oh, if you knew my agony and the torture!

[*He hides his face, trying to master his emotion.*

MRS. CROWLEY goes to him and puts her hand on his shoulder.

MRS. CROWLEY.

Mr. Mackenzie.

ALEC.

[*Springing up.*] Go away. Don't look at me. How can you stand there and watch my weakness? Oh God, give me strength . . . My love was the last human weakness I had. It was right that I should drink that bitter cup. And I've drunk its very dregs. I should have known that I wasn't meant for happiness and a life of ease. I have other work to do in the world. And now that I have overcome this last temptation, I am ready to do it.

MRS. CROWLEY.

But haven't you any pity for yourself, haven't you any thought for Lucy?

ALEC.

Must I tell you, too, that everything I did was for Lucy's sake? And still I love her with all my heart and soul . . .

DICK *comes in.*

DICK.

Here is Lucy!

[*CHARLES comes in and announces LUCY.*

CHARLES.

Miss Allerton!

[*She enters, and DICK, anxious that the meeting shall not be more awkward than need be, goes up to her very cordially.*

DICK.

Ah, my dear Lucy. So glad you were able to come.

LUCY.

[*Giving her hand to DICK, but looking at ALEC.*]
How d'you do?

ALEC.

How d'you do? [*He forces himself to talk.*] How is Lady Kelsey?

LUCY.

She's much better, thanks. We've been to Spa, you know, for her health.

ALEC.

Somebody told me you'd gone abroad. Was it you, Dick? Dick is an admirable person, a sort of gazetteer for polite society.

DICK.

Won't you have some tea, Lucy?

LUCY.

No, thanks!

MRS. CROWLEY.

[*Trying on her side also to make conversation.*] We shall miss you dreadfully when you're gone, Mr. Mackenzie.

DICK.

[*Cheerfully.*] Not a bit of it.

ALEC.

[*Smiling.*] London is an excellent place for showing one of how little importance one is in the world. One makes a certain figure, and perhaps is tempted to think oneself of some consequence. Then one goes away, and on returning is surprised to discover that nobody has even noticed one's absence.

DICK.

You're over-modest, Alec. If you weren't, you

might be a great man. Now, I make a point of telling my friends that I'm indispensable, and they take me at my word.

ALEC.

You are a leaven of flippancy in the heavy dough of British righteousness.

DICK.

The wise man only takes the unimportant quite seriously.

ALEC.

[*With a smile.*] For it is obvious that it needs more brains to do nothing than to be a cabinet minister.

DICK.

You pay me a great compliment, Alec. You repeat to my very face one of my favourite observations.

LUCY.

[*Almost in a whisper.*] Haven't I heard you say that only the impossible is worth doing?

ALEC.

Good heavens, I must have been reading the headings of a copy-book.

MRS. CROWLEY.

[*To DICK.*] Are you going to Southampton to see Mr. Mackenzie off?

DICK.

I shall hide my face on his shoulder and weep salt tears. It'll be most affecting, because in moments of emotion I always burst into epigram.

ALEC.

I loathe all solemn leave-takings. I prefer to part from people with a nod and a smile, whether I'm going for ever or for a day to Brighton.

MRS. CROWLEY.

You're very hard.

ALEC.

Dick has been teaching me to take life flippantly. And I have learnt that things are only serious if you take them seriously, and that is desperately stupid. [*To LUCY.*] Don't you agree with me?

LUCY.

No.

[Her tone, almost tragic, makes him pause for an instant; but he is determined that the conversation shall be purely conventional.]

ALEC.

It's so difficult to be serious without being absurd. That is the chief power of women, that life and death are merely occasions for a change of costume: marriage a creation in white, and the worship of God an opportunity for a Paris bonnet.

[MRS. CROWLEY makes up her mind to force a crisis, and she gets up.]

MRS. CROWLEY.

It's growing late, Dick. Won't you take me round the house?

ALEC.

I'm afraid my luggage has made everything very disorderly.

MRS. CROWLEY.

It doesn't matter. Come, Dick!

DICK.

[To LUCY.] You don't mind if we leave you?

LUCY.

Oh, no.

[MRS. CROWLEY and DICK go out. There is a moment's silence.]

ALEC.

Do you know that our friend Dick has offered his hand and heart to Mrs. Crowley this afternoon?

LUCY.

I hope they'll be very happy. They're very much in love with one another.

ALEC.

[*Bitterly.*] And is that a reason for marrying? Surely love is the worst possible foundation for marriage. Love creates illusions, and marriages destroy them. True lovers should never marry.

LUCY.

Will you open the window? It seems stifling here.

ALEC.

Certainly. [*From the window.*] You can't think what a joy it is to look upon London for the last time. I'm so thankful to get away.

[LUCY gives a little sob and ALEC turns to the window. He wants to wound her and yet cannot bear to see her suffer.

ALEC.

To-morrow at this time I shall be well started. Oh, I long for that infinite surface of the clean and comfortable sea.

LUCY.

Are you very glad to go?

ALEC.

[Turning to her.] I feel quite boyish at the very thought.

LUCY.

And is there no one you regret to leave?

ALEC.

You see, Dick is going to marry. When a man does that, his bachelor friends are wise to depart gracefully before he shows them that he needs their company no longer. I have no relations and few friends. I can't flatter myself that any one will be much distressed at my departure.

LUCY.

[In a low voice.] You must have no heart at all.

ALEC.

[Icily.] If I had, I certainly should not bring it to Portman Square. That sentimental organ would be surely out of place in such a neighbourhood.

LUCY.

[Gets up and goes to him.] Oh, why do you treat me as if we were strangers? How can you be so cruel?

ALEC.

[*Gravely.*] Don't you think that flippancy is the best refuge from an uncomfortable position. We should really be much wiser merely to discuss the weather.

LUCY.

[*Insisting.*] Are you angry because I came?

ALEC.

That would be ungracious on my part. Perhaps it wasn't quite necessary that we should meet again.

LUCY.

You've been acting all the time I've been here. D'you think I didn't see it was unreal when you talked with such cynical indifference. I know you well enough to tell when you're hiding your real self behind a mask.

ALEC.

If I'm doing that, the inference is obvious that I wish my real self to be hidden.

LUCY.

I would rather you cursed me than treat me with such cold politeness.

ALEC.

I'm afraid you're rather difficult to please.

[*LUCY goes up to him passionately, but he draws back so that she may not touch him.*]

LUCY.

Oh, you're of iron. Alec, Alec, I couldn't let you go without seeing you once more. Even you would be satisfied if you knew what bitter anguish I've suffered. Even you would pity me. I don't want you to think too badly of me.

ALEC.

Does it much matter what I think? We shall be so many thousand miles apart.

LUCY.

I suppose that you utterly despise me.

ALEC.

No. I loved you far too much ever to do that. Believe me, I only wish you well. Now that the bitterness is past, I see that you did the only possible thing. I hope that you'll be very happy.

LUCY.

Oh, Alec, don't be utterly pitiless. Don't leave me without a single word of kindness.

ALEC.

Nothing is changed, Lucy. You sent me away on account of your brother's death.

[There is a long silence, and when she speaks it is hesitatingly, as if the words were painful to utter.]

LUCY.

I hated you then, and yet I couldn't crush the love that was in my heart. I used to try and drive you away from my thoughts, but every word you had ever said came back to me. Don't you remember? You told me that everything you did was for my sake. Those words hammered at my heart as though it were an anvil. I struggled not to believe them. I said to myself that you had sacrificed George coldly, callously, prudently, but in my heart I knew it wasn't true. *[He looks at her, hardly able to believe what she*

is going to say, but does not speak.] Your whole life stood on one side and only this hateful story on the other. You couldn't have grown into a different man in one single instant. I came here to-day to tell you that I don't understand the reason of what you did. I don't want to understand. I believe in you now with all my strength. I know that whatever you did was right and just—because you did it.

[He gives a long, deep sigh.]

ALEC.

Thank God! Oh, I'm so grateful to you for that.

LUCY,

Haven't you anything more to say to me than that?

ALEC.

You see, it comes too late. Nothing much matters now, for to-morrow I go away.

LUCY.

But you'll come back.

ALEC.

I'm going to a part of Africa from which Europeans seldom return.

LUCY.

[With a sudden outburst of passion.] Oh, that's too horrible. Don't go, dearest! I can't bear it!

ALEC.

I must now. Everything is settled, and there can be no drawing back.

LUCY.

Don't you care for me any more?

ALEC.

Care for you? I love you with all my heart and soul.

LUCY.

[*Eagerly.*] Then take me with you.

ALEC.

You!

LUCY.

You don't know what I can do. With you to help me I can be brave. Let me come, Alec?

ALEC.

No, it's impossible. You don't know what you ask.

LUCY.

Then let me wait for you? Let me wait till you come back?

ALEC.

And if I never come back?

LUCY.

I will wait for you still.

ALEC.

Then have no fear. I will come back. My journey was only dangerous because I wanted to die. I want to live now, and I shall live.

LUCY.

Oh, Alec, Alec, I'm so glad you love me.

THE END

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